



National Reference Test 2017

Information for senior leaders organising the testing arrangements

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Issued by NFER on behalf of Ofqual. Approved by the Secretary of State as supplementary provisions in accordance with The Education (National Curriculum) (Key Stage 4 Assessment Arrangements) (England) Order 2016¹

¹ <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/476/contents/made>

Purpose of the National Reference Test

Ofqual's National Reference Test (NRT) will provide additional information to support the awarding of GCSEs. The information from the test will be considered each year by Ofqual and the exam boards prior to GCSEs being awarded. The NRT will provide information on changes in performance standards over time and will be based on results from a nationally representative sample of students who will take the test shortly before taking their GCSEs. Currently, exam boards have limited evidence of how performance standards can change over time. The test will indicate if, over several years, there is a change in how students perform at the national level, which exam boards can then consider during awarding. More information about the NRT is available at www.gov.uk/government/collections/national-reference-test-information

Ofqual has appointed NFER to develop, administer and analyse the test on its behalf. To reflect the importance of the new test and to ensure high participation rates, the government has introduced legislation² that requires the participation of state schools that are selected to take part. For maintained schools, this obligation is placed on the school directly through legislation. For the vast majority of academies and free schools, the requirement has effect through their funding agreements.

The students who have been selected to take part

NFER will have requested student data for all of your year 11 students, aged 16 by 31 August 2017, who are eligible to take part in the test comprising forename and surname, gender, date of birth and subjects studied. Students will be eligible to take the test if they are being entered for GCSE English language or GCSE mathematics in summer 2017. (Note: students may not take part if they are taking only the International GCSE, sometimes referred to as a Level 1/Level 2 Certificate, in that subject.)

From the list of eligible students provided by your school, two separate groups of up to 30 students have been randomly selected to sit the test. Please note that 30 students is the upper limit of the number of students we will sample for each subject; there is no lower limit.

Where a student is eligible to sit both subjects, they have been randomly allocated either to the English or mathematics test. Instructions on how to access a list of the students selected to take the test and the subject they have been allocated is provided in the enclosed

² <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2016/476/contents/made>

confirmation letter. Each student has been assigned either the English or mathematics test; no student will take both subjects.

All selected students are expected to take part

We expect all students in the selected group of students to take the test in order to avoid bias in the sample. However, the legislation passed by the Government gives headteachers the right to withdraw students in exceptional circumstances.

Headteachers may withdraw students from the test **only** in the following circumstances:

- a student requires an access arrangement when taking their GCSE in mathematics or English language that is not available to the student for the NRT either because it is not permitted by NFER for use in this test, or it is not included in JCQ's Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments³.
- a student has exceptional, temporary circumstances which, had they occurred during the student's GCSE exams, would have resulted in the student not taking their GCSE exam or being eligible for special consideration, for example:
 - bereavement of a close family member or friend shortly before or at the time of the assessment
 - serious domestic crisis shortly before or at the time of the assessment which results in the student being emotionally affected at the time of the assessment
 - participation in sporting events or other competitions at an international level at the time of the assessment
- other circumstances which the headteacher assesses could cause significant distress for the student were they to take the test, such as exacerbation of an existing medical condition.

If you are unsure whether a student's particular circumstances warrant withdrawal, please contact NFER for guidance.

³ <http://www.jcq.org.uk/exams-office/access-arrangements-and-special-consideration/regulations-and-guidance/access-arrangements-and-reasonable-adjustments-2016-2017>

Engaging with parents

NFER has provided a letter via its school portal that your school can use to provide parents with information about the NRT. We recognise that a small number of parents may not wish for their child to take part, but we ask the school to support the test and ensure participation, if necessary by explaining to parents that the school is legally required to enter selected students into the test, as well as reassuring them that individual students' results in the NRT will not affect their GCSE results.

Information for students taking the test

We have provided an information sheet for students that have been selected to participate in the NRT. It gives students an overview of the test, why it is important they take part and informs them that all participating students will be entered into a prize draw to win an iPad mini. Please ensure that the information sheet is given to all selected students ahead of the testing date so they fully understand their contribution.

When testing will take place at your school

The NRT will take place in schools from **20 February to 3 March 2017**. The date in this testing period that has been selected for your school and the name(s) of NFER's administrator(s) who will be visiting your school will be sent to you in an email in the week beginning 16 January 2017. Please contact NFER if the selected date is no longer convenient. The time of the testing is to be arranged with your NFER administrator at a time that is convenient to you. However, we strongly encourage you to hold the test at the beginning of the morning or afternoon session to prevent students from having to leave lessons part way through.

Please ensure that students who have been selected to take the test are not asked to attend other school activities at the same time, eg mock GCSEs.

The role of NFER's administrator

One or two representatives from the NFER will come to your school to administer the test. All of the test administrators are trained teachers and have enhanced DBS checks. One of the administrators will telephone your nominated school contact before they visit to arrange the most convenient time of day for the testing to take place and to confirm all arrangements. They will bring all the materials required for testing along with them on the day and they will take away with them the completed tests for NFER to mark. Please arrange for a teacher or another member of school staff also to be present throughout the session.

The composition and timing of the test

The English test comprises a reading and a writing part. For both English and mathematics, the test lasts one hour. Schools should plan for a total test administration time of one hour and 30 minutes, to allow for students to be seated and have instructions read to them by the test administrator. After the test students will be asked to complete a short five minute survey about their experience of the NRT and their preparation in general for their GCSE exams.

The test has been carefully designed to be accessible to all students who are due to sit their GCSEs in summer 2017. Students will be asked to make their best attempt at the whole test. The test has a look and feel that is similar to the GCSEs and the content of the test is based on the new GCSEs to be awarded from summer 2017.

The questions in the English and mathematics test are aimed mostly at grades 3 to 7 but also include some questions aimed at grades 1 and 2 to help make them accessible to all students. Unlike the GCSE mathematics exams, the mathematics test is not a tiered assessment. In the mathematics test most of the questions are based on the GCSE content that all students taking the qualification have to study and includes some more straightforward questions at the start to help encourage students. A few questions drawing on higher tier content are at the end of the test booklet.

Keeping the tests secure

The security of the test materials is paramount. The NFER administrator is responsible for the security and confidentiality of the test materials. No photocopies of the test may be made by anyone. During the administration of the test, test materials must not be taken out of the room. All teachers/ other adults who are present in the test room, for example, those providing support with access arrangements, will be required to sign a statement of confidentiality, declaring that the content of the test will not be discussed with any other person.

Arrangements the school needs to make for the test

As the students sampled to take part in the test are likely to be from various classes, please ensure that preparations have been made for all the selected students to be brought to the test room at the time you have agreed with NFER's test administrator. Please prepare a seating plan in advance of the test date, as you do for GCSE exams, so students know exactly where to sit when they enter the examination room and which test should be given to them.

The test will be administered under exam conditions similar to those at GCSE. Please ensure any relevant displays and posters in the test room are covered and desks are positioned an appropriate distance apart so students cannot see each other's test. Mobile phones are strictly prohibited in the room where the testing is taking place.

Access arrangements

NFER will apply access arrangements similar to those used at GCSE. The following access arrangements and reasonable adjustments can be used for any student who is expecting to receive the arrangement/adjustment in their GCSEs:

- Extra time
- Rest breaks and the use of a prompter to help remind students where they are with the test
- A reader (for the English reading test, a reader can only be used for the instructions at the beginning of the test)
- A scribe
- A sign language interpreter
- Read Aloud
- Examination reader pen – only the following two JCQ approved pens are acceptable:
 - C-Pen Exam Reader
 - WizCom Exam Pen

Reading pens are only suitable for assisting with reading one or two words in a sentence and are not suitable for all candidates who qualify for a reader. Candidates should be familiar and experienced with using these pens in order to get an accurate reading.

The following modifications to the test and computer based arrangements can be used:

- Word processors

NFER will provide students expecting to use a word processor for their GCSE exams with access to a secure online tool in order to type their answers to the test. For this access arrangement, schools will need to provide laptops with internet access for each student.

In advance of the test date, you will be sent a link to a diagnostic tool to test the compatibility of the online tool with the laptop the student will be using on the day and the internet connectivity in the exam room.

Under no circumstances should a student use their own laptop to type answers into any software or tool other than the NFER secure online tool, as this could compromise the security of the test.

- Enlarged or Modified Large Print papers
 - An enlarged paper will be an enlargement of the original paper from A4 to A3, which does not specify font size
 - The Modified Large Print papers available are:
 - 18 pt or 24 pt on A4 paper
 - 36 pt on A3 paper.

- Test printed on coloured paper
 - We will endeavour to provide the requested colour or as close a match as possible.

- Braille versions of the test
 - A Unified English Braille (UEB) version of the test will be available.

Translated versions of the test will not be available. The use of a dictionary is not permitted in the English test. The use of a bilingual dictionary is permitted in the mathematics test for students for whom English is not their first language and if it only provides a translation of the mathematical term, not the definition or illustration.

Responsibilities for providing the access arrangements

If a student will require a modified test or use a word processor to respond, please request this from NFER as soon as possible and **no later than 1 February 2017**. If any of the selected students require any modified scripts or word processors, please follow the instructions provided in the enclosed confirmation letter to upload your requests to our school portal.

The school is responsible for the provision of other arrangements such as the provision of a scribe or reader. Please advise NFER's test administrator if any students will be given extra time.

You should also discuss any access arrangements with your lead test administrator to allow sufficient time for the preparation of these arrangements.

Students that require access arrangements should ideally be accommodated in the main examination room under the supervision of the administrator. If this is not possible due to the

specific requirements of the student, please discuss this with NFER's test administrator or with NFER staff directly.

Equipment students will need

For the test, students require a black pen or sharp HB or 2B pencil. Students must **not** use gel pens. If the student is using a pencil, they must write firmly.

For the mathematics test, students will be required to have a scientific calculator (suitable for use in a GCSE exam) and a ruler. NFER will provide students with mirrors.

Recognising schools' and students' participation

In recognition of the time taken in your school to participate in the NRT we will provide each participating school with a cheque for £190. Participating students will be entered into a draw with a prize of an iPad mini.

We are unable to provide schools with results for individual students due to the confidential nature of the test and because each student will only take a part of the complete National Reference Test. We are also unable to provide overall results for each school because the students that are selected to take the test will not be representative of all students at that school.

Confidentiality

The data collected by NFER will be shared with Ofqual for the purposes of analysis. All data relating to this project will be kept confidential by NFER and Ofqual, and no individual school or student will be identified in any way in any ensuing reports about the analysis. Starting in 2018, Ofqual intends to publish national measures of performance each year when GCSE results are announced. Data from the test will not be provided to the Department for Education, Ofsted or local authorities, and will not be used in any measures of school performance. The results of individual students will not be used in awarding their GCSEs. All data collected on access arrangements for individual students will be securely destroyed after the testing has been completed.

Contact information

If you have any questions or queries about the test, please contact NFER by telephone on 01753 637 383 or by email to NRTkeystage4@nfer.ac.uk

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Any enquiries regarding this publication should be sent to:

NFER
The Mere
Upton Park
Slough
Berkshire SL1 2DQ

Telephone: 01753 637 383

Email: NRTkeystage4@nfer.ac.uk