

# **Summary of Host Research on Textbooks, Study Aids and Support Services**

Summary



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## Purpose

In January 2012 we launched a programme of work on **Textbooks, Study Aids and Support Services Research**. The scope of the work focused on whether textbooks and other support material including revision and study aids (whether awarded organisation-endorsed or produced by independent publishers) are negatively impacting on standards and/or public confidence in high-stakes qualifications and whether market forces or systemic issues may be contributing factors. The overall objective of the programme was to **develop a long-term action plan to address issues**.

An initial review of the evidence determined the core gaps in the evidence base was the need for a more detailed understanding of centre purchasing behaviour, decision-making, use of textbooks, study aids and support services and the impact this has standards of qualifications and more broadly on teaching and learning. The concept map below illustrates these gaps. The map draws on all the evidence collated for the project and highlights the emerging themes, the larger the concept the stronger/more evidence available.

## Evidence Gap Analysis



As a result we commissioned a piece of research<sup>1</sup>, the key aims of which is to understand the following:

<b>Research Objectives</b>	<b>This paper reports on:</b>
1. The textbook/specification selection and purchase process.	Yes
2. The process for selecting and purchasing training services.	No – A training specific summary will be compiled.
3. Any concerns regarding these processes, including in particular any risks to the standards of qualifications and teaching and learning.	Yes
4. What the causes of those concerns may be and views on possible solutions including regulatory arrangements.	No – A separate evidence systematic review has been conducted. Please see Appendix 1

## **This paper**

The aim of this paper is to present the key findings from the research in relation to these objectives. The findings of this study form part of the evidence base used to devise the **conflicts of interest – Textbooks Risks and Opportunities Action Plan**.

## **Methodology**

A mixed-method approach was used for this research and comprised:

- **Literature review** to collate a complete picture of the issues and to inform the quantitative and qualitative stages.

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<sup>1</sup> HOST Policy Research were commissioned to conduct the research

- **Quantitative fieldwork: 556 interviews**, a telephone survey with schools and colleges in England (454 interviews), Wales (51 interviews) and Northern Ireland (51 interviews), covering all centre types proportionately. We spoke to **senior management team/heads of department for the following subjects and qualifications: A level: French, history English literature, and GCSE: maths and science.**
- **Qualitative fieldwork:** This consisted of **20 case studies** with selected schools and colleges. It involved in-depth interviews with head teachers, senior leadership and heads of department. **The case studies focussed on the whole school and the English, maths and Science department perspectives.**
- **Thematic analysis** to collate information from the quantitative and qualitative findings.

## Research objectives and key messages

The table below summarises the key messages with reference to the research objectives.

Research Objectives	Key Messages – What we have found:
<b>The textbook/ specification selection and purchasing process.</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Heads of the Department make the decisions on which awarding organisation specification and study resources should be used.</li> <li>2. Selection of textbooks and study aids is primarily based on the link it has with specification and assessment.</li> <li>3. Overall, the evidence indicates the awarding organisations' provision of specification, assessment and support services are the top three reasons for choosing an awarding organisation.</li> <li>4. Issues with student outcomes (review of outcomes/grades and pressure to achieve certain results) are the key factors that determine a switch between awarding organisations, followed by reasons related to the specification, awarding organisation differences and marking.</li> <li>5. The top three factors influencing the choice of textbooks in rank order are: whole-specification coverage, accessibility and visual layout. For other study aids it is: coverage of specification, cost and accessibility.</li> <li>6. The single most important factor influencing choice for both textbooks and other study aids is it covers the specification. The only difference in the factors for choice is that relevance is more important for other study aids while awarding organisation endorsement is more important for textbooks.</li> </ol>
<b>Concerns regarding these processes,</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Teachers said they are not reliant on a single textbook or any one study resource, and they use a range of</li> </ol>

<p><b>including in particular any risks to the standards of teaching and learning.</b></p>	<p>resources to facilitate their teaching.</p> <p>8. The top three resources used in the classroom are past papers, textbooks related to the specification and teacher/centre developed resources.</p> <p>9. The popularity of online resources (in particular awarding organisation-developed ones) has grown in the last 15 years and over three-quarters of teachers use online resources.</p> <p>10. Teachers' attitudes and behaviours differed – they stated their purchasing decisions were not influenced by awarding organisation endorsement or marketing, but 65 per cent of respondents purchased awarding organisation-endorsed or published textbooks and over 50 per cent purchased other awarding organisation-endorsed textbooks.</p> <p>11. Teachers believe that the competitive market place has improved quality, range, content and lowered cost.</p> <p>12. Quality of textbooks was a recurring theme, and informed choice when selecting an awarding organisation. There is a perception that quality has improved, but this can be compromised by the rush to get resources published. There was no clear agreement on the quality of textbooks.</p> <p>13. For a number of teachers cost is still a reason why they do not use awarding organisation-endorsed textbooks and study aids.</p> <p>14. Textbooks and study aids are important for students learning outside the classroom.</p> <p>15. The research found that the key benefit of awarding organisation materials in supporting teaching and learning is the close link they have with the specification and the assessment.</p> <p>16. Teachers believe there is a risk that the support materials supplied by awarding organisations result in an over focus on exam preparation. This can narrow the focus of learning, lead to an over-reliance on the sources, and</p>
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	result in uninspiring learning.
<b>Subject differences</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ On the whole the differences among subjects were minor and overall sector/market patterns were found.</li></ul>



## Key Findings

### 1. Purchasing behaviour and/ decision-making

This section summarises the key findings regarding the decision making and reasons for choosing and selecting awarding organisations.

The research found 89 % respondents stated the heads of department are the decision makers, for choosing awarding organisation-specification, rather than senior leadership in schools and colleges.

Chart 1: Reasons for choosing awarding organisation.

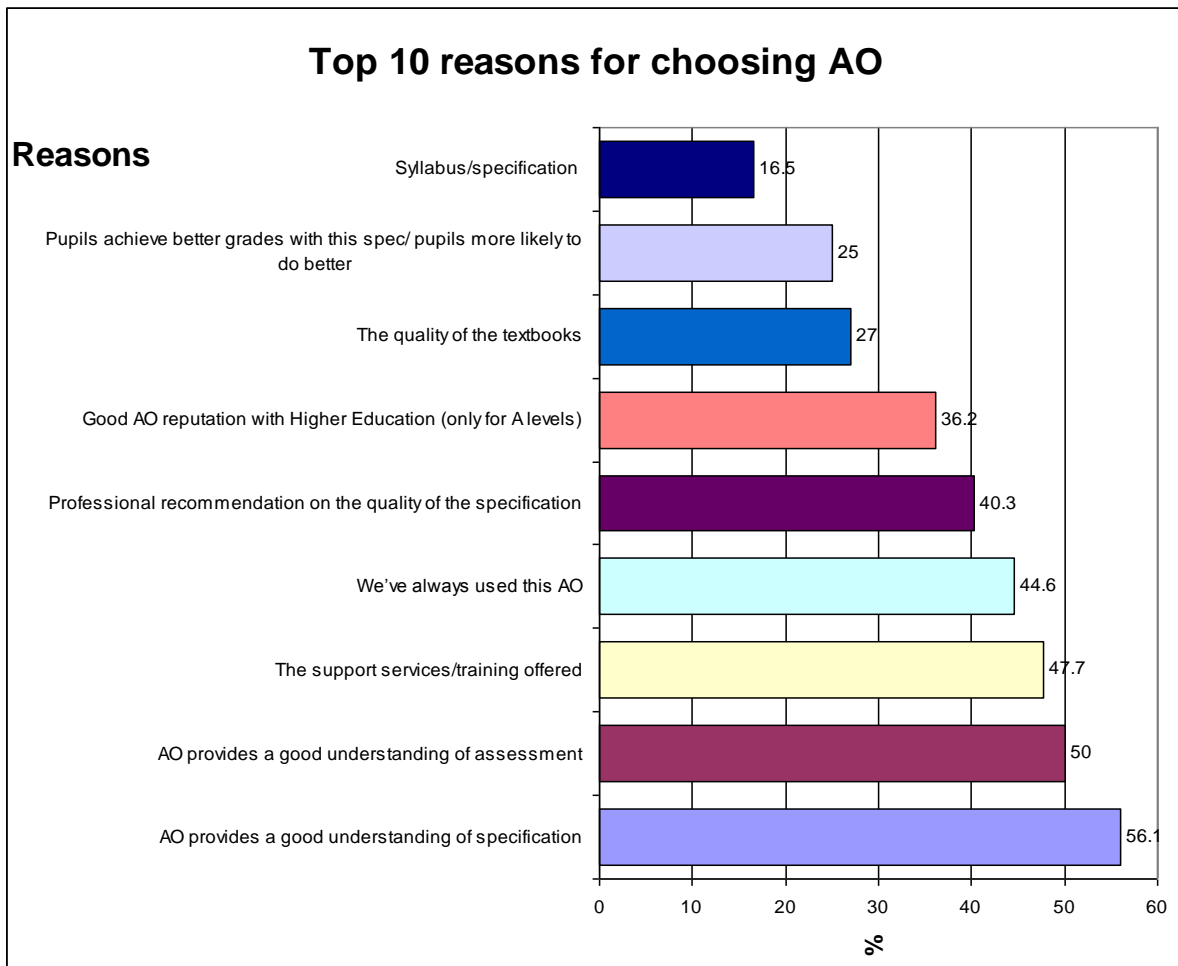


Chart 1 shows the top ten reasons mentioned by respondents when choosing an awarding organisation. In total, 26 different reasons were mentioned and all

respondents outlined a combination of reasons. The factors most mentioned by the respondents are:

- 56% stated the awarding organisation provides a good understanding of specification
- 50% stated awarding organisation provides a good understanding of assessment
- 48% choose the awarding organisation for the support services and training offered
- 45% stated selection was based on familiarity as they have always used awarding organisation.

Of the respondents, 27 per cent specifically mentioned 'quality of the textbook' as a reason for choosing an awarding organisation. Overall, the evidence indicates the awarding organisations offering in terms of specification, assessment and support services were the most important reasons in influencing choice.

Respondents were asked to give the single most important reason. No single factor dominated choice, reinforcing the fact that a range of factors influenced decision-making. These findings were supported by the case-study qualitative evidence from schools/colleges.

There is some difference between centre types in their reasons for selecting particular awarding organisations:

- Colleges and Academies are more likely to respond to student demand (22 per cent and 24 per cent, respectively) than Foundation schools (6 per cent) and Independent schools (12 per cent).
- Academies are far less likely than other centre types to keep an awarding organisation because they have always used it (28 per cent, compared with 40-50 per cent for other centre types).
- Academies are also clear they would not select awarding organisation because of a reputation of being easy to pass (0 per cent) compared with 9 per cent of Independent schools, 8 per cent of Community schools and 15 per cent Voluntary schools.
- When asked what the single most important factor was, Academies stood out from the other centre types citing Personal recommendation (16 per cent) and Pupils more likely to do well (16 per cent), compared with an overall tendency

towards the support services/training offered (11 per cent overall) and a tradition of using that awarding organisation (14 per cent overall). However, in all cases, 'other' was the most common choice, as cited by around 34 per cent of centres.

While in general the breakdown by subject is reasonably consistent, a few differences were noted:

- there is some indication that maths GCSE specification is more likely to be selected on the basis that pupils are more likely to do well (38 per cent compared with around 20 per cent for the other subjects).
- However, as this factor was also reported by 28 per cent of science GCSE teachers it may relate to a GCSE/A level divide rather than subject difference.

**Chart 2:** Reasons for switching awarding organisation

Reasons for switching AO	Subject					
	French A Level	Science GCSE	History A Level	English Literature A Level	Maths GCSE	Total %
Assessment and Marking	22.5%	33.9%	24.1%	15.5%	9.9%	21.2%
Specification related	24.3%	16.1%	33.0%	33.6%	21.6%	25.7%
External factors	3.6%	6.3%	5.4%	2.7%	2.7%	4.1%
AO related	14.4%	18.8%	26.8%	22.7%	30.6%	22.7%
Textbook and support material	8.1%	23.2%	17.9%	18.2%	17.1%	16.9%
Internal centre issues	2.7%	5.4%	7.1%	3.6%	7.2%	5.2%
Ofsted inspection	.0%	.9%	.9%	.0%	.0%	0.4%
Student outcomes	53.2%	32.1%	35.7%	42.7%	29.7%	38.7%
Nothing/none	11.7%	3.6%	1.8%	1.8%	10.8%	5.9%
Other	2.7%	3.6%	4.5%	1.8%	1.8%	2.9%

Chart 2 shows the reasons why teachers might consider changing awarding organisations. It shows student outcomes (39 per cent) is the most common reason, followed by reasons related to the issues with the specification (26 per cent), to the awarding organisation delivery (23 per cent) and then reasons relating to marking and the assessment (21 per cent).

The differences noted are:

- Changing awarding organisation because of textbooks and support material was frequently reported for all subjects except French A level.
- The highest proportion of respondents that would consider switching because of issues with student outcome is for French A level, at 53 per cent.
- Concerns with marking are less important for the maths GCSE respondents. Overall, there is very little variation among subjects when it comes to the reasons for changing awarding organisations.

The evidence from the case studies shows that all schools' and colleges' decisions on purchase of textbooks and study aids are primarily the responsibility of the head of department (or equivalent). This reflects the decision-making process over the choice of awarding organisation.

## **2. The choice and use of textbooks and study aids**

This section focuses on the key findings on factors that influence choice and use of textbook and study aids.

Chart 3 shows the top 10 factors that influence the respondent's choice when selecting a textbook, and the top 10 factors that influence choice of other study aids<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Such as revision guides, workbooks and online resources

**Chart3:** Factors influencing the choice of textbook and study aids

Total %	Top 10 Factors influencing the choice of study aids <sup>3</sup>	Top 10 Factors influencing the choice of textbooks	Total %
48.2%	1. Covers specification/ curriculum	1. Certainty that it covers the whole specification/ curriculum	52.3%
39.7%	2. Cost	2. Accessible	29.0%
28.8%	3. Accessible	3. Visual layout	24.1%
16.0%	4. Engaging	4. Contains practice questions	22.3%
14.4%	5. Visual layout	5. Cost	22.1%
13.8%	6. Contains practice questions	6. Engaging	20.5%
12.6%	7. Suits all candidates	7. Contains a broad coverage of the subject area	18.5%
11.0%	8. Contains a broad coverage of the subject area	8. Suits all candidates	16.5%
9.9%	9. Relevant	9. Is endorsed by the awarding organisation	13.8%
8.1%	10. Challenges more able students	10. Challenges more able students	11.9%

As Chart 3 illustrates, 52 per cent of respondents state their textbook choice is influenced by the certainty that it covers the whole specification and curriculum. This was the single most important factor, followed by how accessible the textbook is, the visual layout, if it contains practice questions, and cost. Around 14 per cent mentioned 'Is endorsed by the awarding organisation' as a factor that influences the choice of the textbook.

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<sup>3</sup> ibid

Similar to textbooks, 48 per cent cited that the main factor influencing their choice of study aids is that they cover the specification and curriculum. This was the single most important factor, followed by the cost, accessibility, engaging for the student, and visual layout. With study aids the research indicates cost is more important than it is with textbook choice. Chart 3 shows that the top ten factors influencing choice of textbooks and study aids are similar. Comparing these two lists, the only difference, in the top ten, is that relevance is more important for study aids, while awarding organisation endorsement is more important for textbooks.

There are some subject variations in the factors influencing choice, for study aids; for two subjects, GCSE Science and maths, costs are a more important consideration than coverage of the specification. Similarly, the accessibility of the study aids was more important for the two GCSE subjects than for the A level subjects. Independent schools were more likely to say that they did not use study aids.

For textbooks there was some variance by subject in terms of factors mentioned. For textbooks the specification coverage was the most important factor. Maths and Science GCSE respondents cited the importance of practice questions and cost. For Science GCSE and A level History, visual layout was an important factor.

**Chart 4:** Types of textbooks and resources used to support teaching

Types of textbooks and resources used	Subject					Total
	French A level	Science GCSE	History A level	English Literature A level	Maths GCSE	
Past papers available for the specification	93.7	93.8	95.5	92.7	91.9	93.5
Textbooks related to the specification	95.5	92.9	98.2	75.5	89.2	90.3
Own resources	78.4	75.9	89.3	85.5	88.3	83.5
On-line resources	88.3	68.8	74.1	76.4	79.3	77.3
Revision guides	37.8	81.3	48.2	44.5	70.3	56.5
BBC teaching aids	31.5	69.6	33.0	30.0	38.7	40.6
Student Workbooks and answer guides	53.2	48.2	22.3	23.6	39.6	37.4
A generic textbook with no links to the exam board or a particular specification	39.6	26.8	55.4	26.4	33.3	36.3
Resources published by national subject associations	18.9	40.2	31.3	37.3	36.9	32.9
E-books	22.5	36.6	19.6	27.3	27.9	26.8

The research found all respondents used, on average, a combination of five different resources, indicating that the respondents are not wholly reliant on textbooks or one resource. The four most popular resources used, as illustrated in Chart 4, are: past papers (94 per cent overall); textbooks related to the specification (published by awarding organisation, endorsed by awarding organisation or neither but relevant to

specification – 90 per cent); resources developed by the centre (84 per cent); and online resources (77 per cent). For these four no subject variation was found.

Only 36 per cent of respondents cited a generic textbook unrelated to the specification or awarding organisation as being used, although 55 per cent of A level History teachers stated they use generic textbooks. A key difference noted is that revision guides are used by over 50 per cent for GCSE Science and Maths and less than 50 per cent for the A level subjects (French, History and English Literature).

The case study interviews with centres found the majority of teachers of English do not, or very rarely, use textbooks (particularly in English Literature); with teachers stating that they exclusively or near-exclusively used resources generated by the English Department. This finding is echoed in the quantitative survey, where 15 per cent of respondents teaching English A level stated that their reason for not purchasing Awarding Organisation produced or endorsed textbooks was that they did not use any textbooks. This was unique to this subject.

### **3. Marketing, endorsement and purchasing**

This section reviews and summarise the key findings on the influence of awarding organisation marketing and endorsement on purchasing and the impact this has on choices outlined in the previous section.

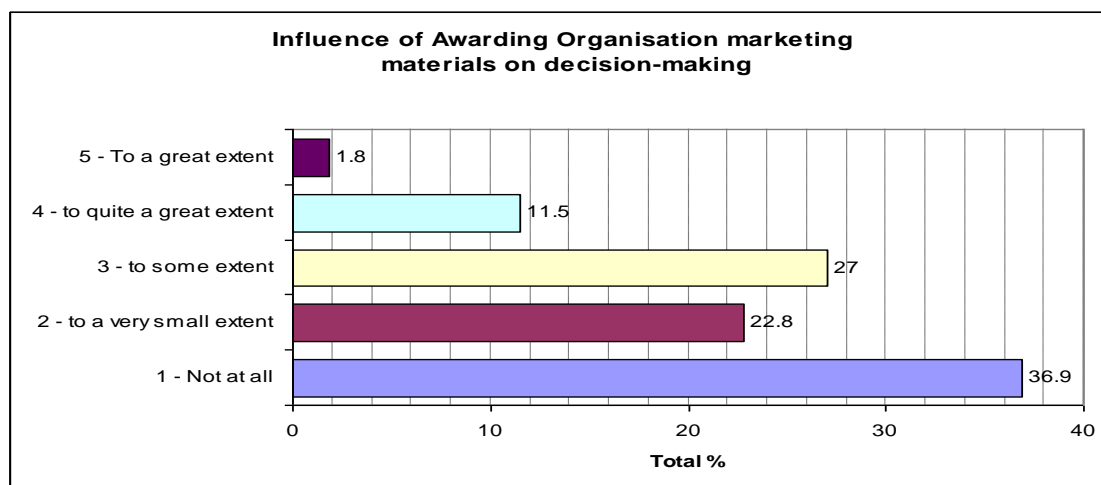
#### **3.1 Awarding organisation Marketing**

Chart 5 below, shows that 40 per cent were influenced to some extent and above and over a third (37 per cent) stated they were not at all influenced by the marketing material. Those respondents that said they had been somewhat influenced by an Awarding Organisation's marketing materials were significantly more likely to purchase textbooks endorsed by the Awarding Organisation.

In terms of subject variation, those responsible for Mathematics GCSE were more likely to say they were not influenced at all by marketing.



**Chart 5:** Influence of awarding organisation marketing material



This finding was explored during the case study visits and it was found that the majority of schools stated that they were not influenced by any implied 'special benefit' in using endorsed awarding organisation textbooks and study aids rather than those produced by another organisation. Predominantly, schools did not feel pressurised to purchase textbooks or study aids that are either published by the awarding organisation or endorsed by them.

In terms of visibility of awarding organisation, endorsement 71 per cent of respondents said that it was very easy or quite easy to identify whether resources are endorsed by the awarding organisation.

### 3.2 Endorsement and purchasing

In the quantitative survey, nearly 65 per cent of respondents purchased textbooks published by the awarding organisation or from a publisher endorsed by the awarding organisation. This suggests that teacher attitudes differ from their actual purchasing behaviour. Almost a quarter (24 per cent) of the total sample did not purchase an awarding organisation endorsed textbook and, of this quarter, 28 per cent said this was due to cost.

Interestingly, in terms of respondents purchasing other study aids, over half cited they bought from a publisher endorsed by the awarding organisation for the subject specification (58 per cent) and over half used free online resources (55 per cent).

**Chart 6:** Awarding organisation endorsement and textbook purchasing

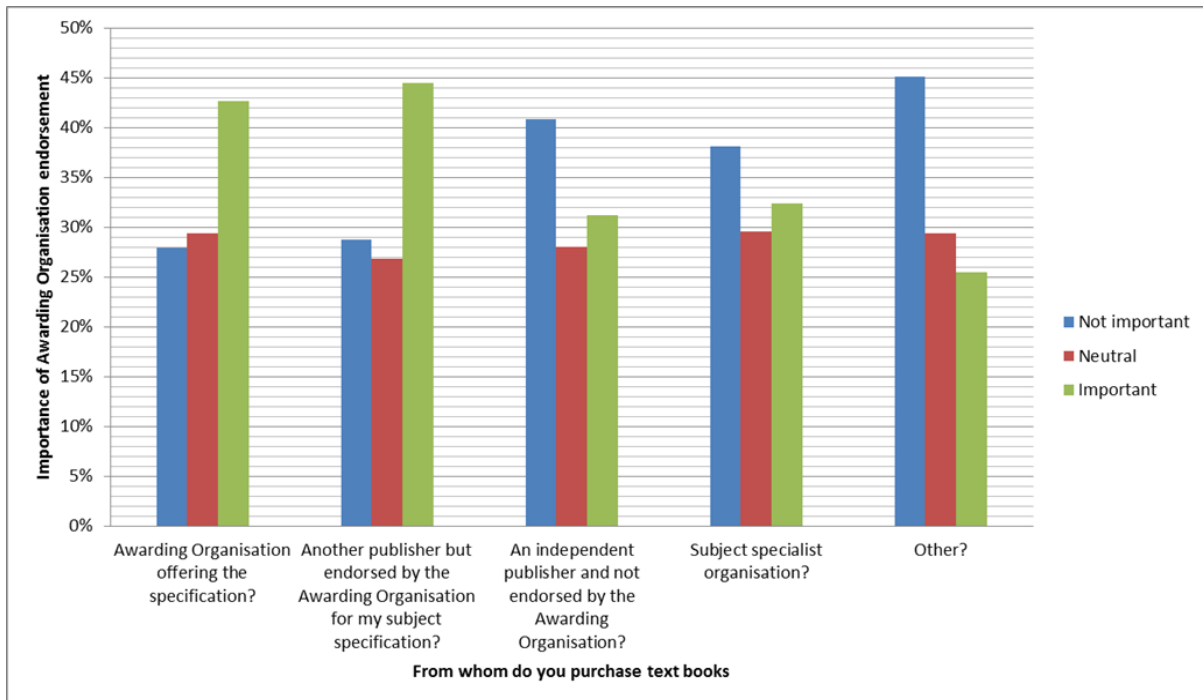


Chart 6 illustrates that teachers are more likely to buy awarding organisation-produced or endorsed textbooks if they value the awarding organisation endorsement. However, this effect is not very large (10-15 per cent difference).

**Chart 7:** Awarding organisation endorsement and textbook purchasing



Base AQA 229, CCEA 35, Edexcel 131, OCR 89, WJEC 67

The variations between columns (awarding organisations) on chart 7 above shows that which awarding organisation's specification a centre studies does make a

difference to their approach to buying textbooks. In some cases this will relate to the awarding organisation's strategy for endorsed textbooks and whether centres understand the difference between endorsement and awarding organisation published.

In terms of the effectiveness of endorsed products, almost half of respondents (48 per cent) felt that the products endorsed by awarding organisations were neither more nor less effective than other products, while a third (32 per cent) thought that endorsed products were more effective than others available. For Science GCSE, there was a view that awarding organisation endorsed products were more effective, while respondents for English Literature A level were less likely to say products were more effective.

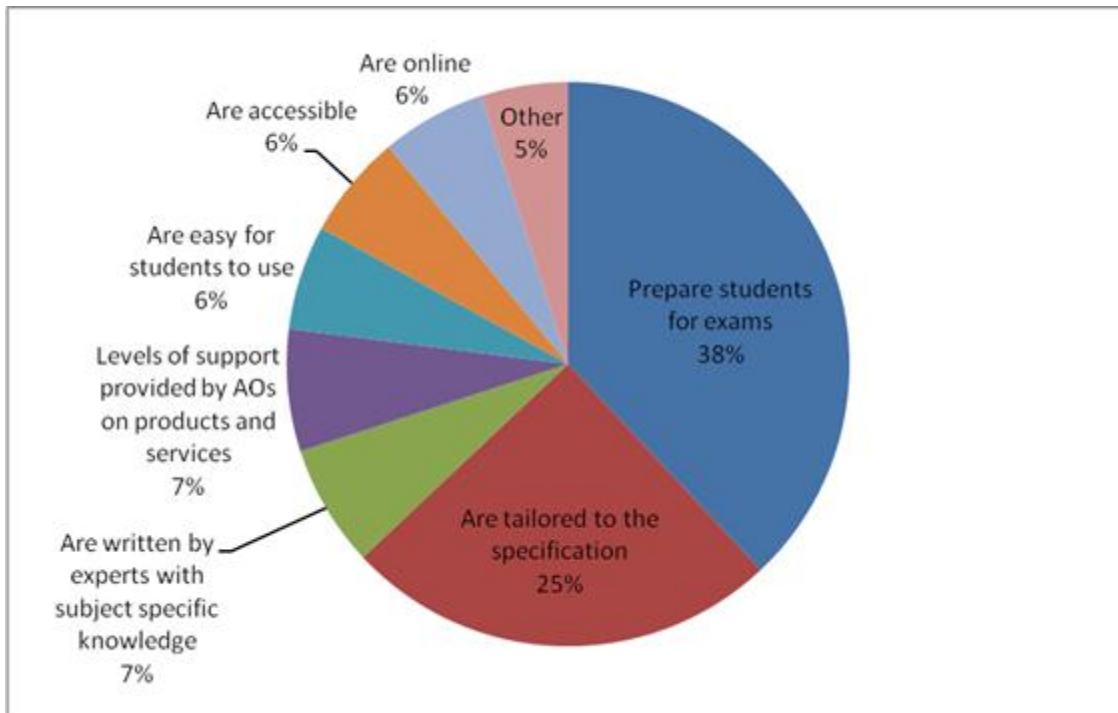
## **4. Impact on teaching and learning**

This section collates the findings on the impact that purchasing decisions, marketing endorsement and textbook and study use has on teaching and learning.

### **4.1 Benefits of qualifications and support materials**

Chart 8 illustrates the key benefits mentioned by respondents. The two biggest benefits (63 per cent) of awarding organisation products and support services to support teaching and learning were the close link between the specification and that they help prepare students for exams. 38 per cent of these respondents felt the key benefit of awarding organisation material is that it prepares students for exams.

**Chart 8** - The benefits of awarding organisation products and services given in response to the telephone survey



The case study evidence highlighted several factors:

- Textbooks and study aids support rather than lead teaching and learning.
- Awarding organisation endorsed textbooks facilitate students' preparation for exams, which is supported by the findings from the telephone survey. Interviews with maths departments did not clarify the exact value that textbooks have in helping students to prepare for exams.
- The choice of resources available is a benefit but, there was no clear consensus on whether the amount of choice of textbooks and study aids is appropriate.
- The competitive nature of the marketplace is seen to have had a positive impact on the resources available: their quality, better-designed materials, increased choice, lower prices and greater teacher involvement in the development of resources. However, there are some concerns that quality can be compromised by a rush to get resources published.

The case study interviews found that textbooks and study aids were important for students learning outside of the classroom. They stated that students use the resources to:

- Help with homework and encourage independent learning

- Support further study and consolidate their learning
- Support revision (especially by the use of study aids accessed online via Virtual Learning Environments).

They also mentioned that it is important for teachers to signpost resources that are appropriate to an individual student's ability and learning style – one size does not fit all.

#### **4.2 Concerns associated with qualifications support materials and textbooks**

Around 71 per cent of respondents identified potential risks to standards in teaching and learning as a result of using textbooks and study aids provided by awarding organisations. The main perceived risks identified are: the packages of support material supplied by awarding organisations can narrow the focus of learning and can lead to an over-reliance on the sources by students and teachers.

Respondents were also asked what they thought the negative impact of textbooks and study aids were on teaching and learning, which drew a wide range of responses. The majority of these concerns relate to the way resources are used. Some 54 per cent stated it narrowed teaching as it limits the scope of learning, content is limited, subject breadth is reduced and encourages particular routes to learning. Also, 30 per cent commented on how it can lead to uninspiring learning – where learning becomes dull and boring. It can encourage lazy teaching practices, and reduce independent learning for students and opportunities for students to demonstrate creativity. Only 13 per cent stated that there were no negative impacts on teaching and learning.

Exploring these concerns further in the case-study visits identified that accessibility to awarding organisation resources is a key concern, as cost often prevents use. Teachers identified that greater use of interactive and online textbooks would be a solution to their concerns about costs, updates to specifications and the marketplace. But the expansion and growing use of online resources (the research found more than 75 per cent of respondents used them) is not fully understood and this may be an area of concern.

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