

GCSE Mathematics: Decisions on Requirements and Guidance



In May 2015 we published a consultation about possible changes to the rules and guidance for reformed GCSEs (graded 9 to 1) in mathematics.

This consultation set out revised requirements and guidance that we proposed should apply to all reformed GCSEs in mathematics.

We have reviewed the responses to the consultation and are now announcing our decisions. We are also publishing a more detailed analysis of the responses alongside this document.¹

Requirements

To ensure that assessment objective weightings do not prevent exam boards from using good quality tasks or questions, we proposed to allow them limited flexibility to deviate from those weightings. We suggested allowing a deviation of ± 3 per cent on weightings in a given exam series.

On the whole, respondents supported this approach, noting that it was sensible and should allow exam boards to design good assessments. A small number of respondents suggested that our proposals did not go far enough, and that we should allow deviation of up to 5 per cent.

Our view remains that a deviation of 3 per cent allows exam boards sufficient flexibility, and that a higher percentage would permit too much variation between exam boards in a given exam series. We have therefore decided to confirm our consultation proposal of ± 3 per cent deviation.

Some respondents also commented that it was unclear whether we expected exam boards to average out differences over each two-year period separately, or over a rolling two-year period.

To confirm, our new rules mean that exam boards will have to ensure that, on average, marks would match the assessment objective weightings over the first two years of awarding, then over years three to four, five to six (and so on), but **not** over

¹ www.gov.uk/government/consultations/gcse-reform-regulations-for-mathematics

a rolling two-year period. This was our intention, and is the approach supported by respondents.

We are therefore confirming this aspect of our proposals, but have made changes to the wording to make our expectations clearer.

Guidance

We proposed to introduce revised guidance designed to promote more effective assessment of mathematical problem-solving in new GCSE mathematics.

Again, most respondents welcomed our proposed guidance, commenting that it was helpful and sensible. A small number of respondents did express concerns that our guidance could still promote an ‘atomised’ approach to assessment, rather than one that focused on true multi-step problem-solving.

Given the broad support for our proposals, our view remains that our revised guidance should help ensure that exam boards take a consistent and more effective approach to mathematical problem-solving. We have therefore decided to adopt our proposed revised guidance in full.

Other issues

A small number of respondents were concerned that making changes to our guidance so close to the introduction of new mathematics GCSEs could make it difficult for teachers to plan lessons. They suggested delaying the introduction of new mathematics GCSEs to give teachers more time to prepare.

The changes we proposed are technical in nature – some questions on exam papers will change, but the subject content and assessment objectives are unaffected. For this reason, we do not think our proposals should have a significant impact on the way that mathematics is taught in schools.

Next steps

Alongside this document, we have published revised versions of *Subject Level Conditions and Requirements*² and *Subject Level Guidance*³ for GCSE mathematics.

New mathematics GCSEs will be taught in schools from September 2015.

² www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-conditions-and-requirements-for-mathematics

³ www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-subject-level-guidance-for-mathematics