

# **GCSE Sociology**

Consultation on Conditions and guidance



March 2016

Ofqual/16/5856

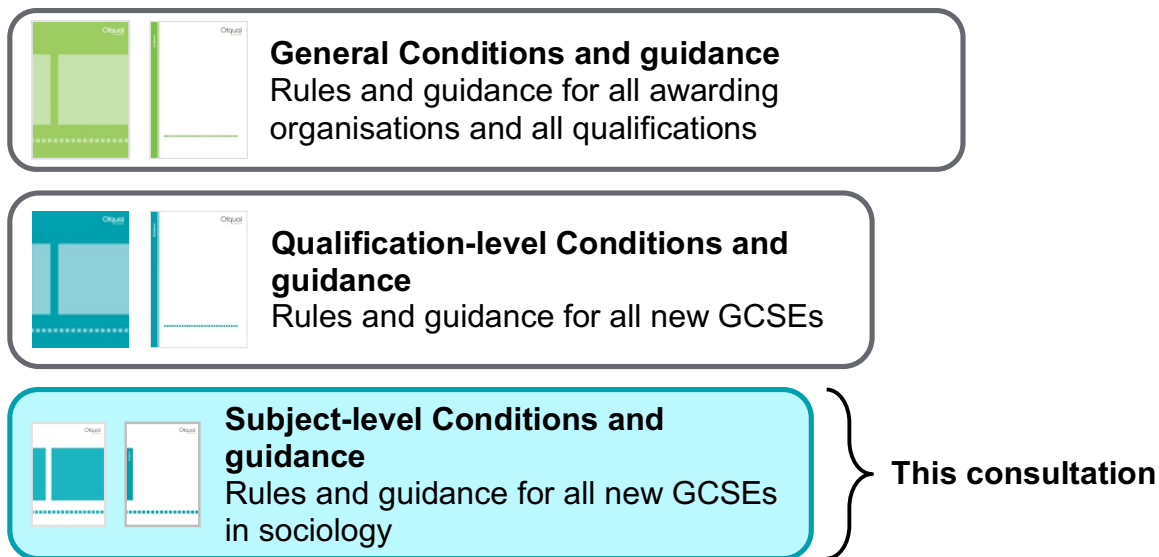
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# 1. Introduction

- 1.1 As most readers will know, changes are being made to GCSEs, AS and A levels taken by students in England. New GCSE qualifications in sociology will be taught in schools from September 2017.
- 1.2 The Department for Education (DfE) published the subject content<sup>1</sup> for GCSE sociology in March 2016.
- 1.3 Following our own consultation on assessment arrangements for this subject, we confirmed<sup>2</sup> in March 2016 that new GCSEs in sociology will:
- be assessed entirely by exam; and
  - not be tiered.
- 1.4 We also confirmed the assessment objectives for GCSE sociology.

## Scope of this consultation



- 1.5 This consultation builds on our – and the DfE’s – earlier decisions. It seeks views on the subject-specific rules and guidance we should put in place for GCSE sociology.
- 1.6 As explained in Appendix A, and illustrated in the figure above, these new rules and guidance will sit alongside our existing rules and guidance for:

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-sociology>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/development-of-new-gcse-and-a-levels-for-teaching-from-2017>

- all qualifications,<sup>3</sup> and
- all new GCSE qualifications.<sup>4</sup>

1.7 This document sets out, and seeks views on:

- our proposed approach to regulating new GCSEs in sociology; and
- the subject-specific Conditions, requirements and guidance we propose to introduce to implement that approach.

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<sup>3</sup> [www.gov.uk/guidance/awarding-organisations-understanding-our-regulatory-requirements#requirements-for-all-awarding-organisations-and-all-regulated-qualifications](http://www.gov.uk/guidance/awarding-organisations-understanding-our-regulatory-requirements#requirements-for-all-awarding-organisations-and-all-regulated-qualifications)

<sup>4</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/collections/gcses-9-to-1-requirements-and-guidance](http://www.gov.uk/government/collections/gcses-9-to-1-requirements-and-guidance)

## How to respond to this consultation

The closing date for responses is 1 April 2016.

Please respond to this consultation in one of three ways:

- Complete the online response at <https://www.surveygizmo.com/s3/2631546/GCSE-reform-regulations-for-sociology>
- Complete the consultation questions at the end of this document and email your response to [consultations@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:consultations@ofqual.gov.uk). Please include the consultation title (GCSE Sociology – Consultation on Conditions and guidance) in the subject line of the email and make clear who you are and in what capacity you are responding
- Post your response to: GCSE Sociology – Consultation on Conditions and guidance 2016, Ofqual, Spring Place, Herald Avenue, Coventry, CV5 6UB, making clear who you are and in what capacity you are responding

## Evaluating the responses

To evaluate responses properly, we need to know who is responding to the consultation and in what capacity. We will therefore only consider your response if you complete the information page.

Any personal data (such as your name, address and any other identifying information) will be processed in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and our standard terms and conditions.

We will publish our evaluation of responses. Please note that we may publish all or part of your response unless you tell us (in your answer to the confidentiality question) that you want us to treat your response as confidential. If you tell us you wish your response to be treated as confidential, we will not include your details in any published list of respondents, although we may quote from your response anonymously.

Please respond by 1 April 2016.

## 2. Regulating GCSE sociology

### Compliance with subject content and assessment objectives

- 2.1 As we explained in paragraph 1.2, DfE has published the subject content for new GCSEs in sociology.<sup>5</sup>
- 2.2 One of the ways we ensure new GCSEs, AS and A levels are comparable across exam boards is by requiring them to be in line with the relevant subject content and our assessment objectives.
- 2.3 The approach we have taken in every other new GCSE, AS and A level qualification is to introduce subject-specific Conditions which:
- require exam boards to comply with the requirements of the subject content (and have regard to any guidance within the subject content); and
  - require exam boards to comply with our assessment objectives (and have regard to our guidance on those assessment objectives).
- 2.4 In all other subjects this Condition includes a provision which requires exam boards to interpret the subject content in line with any rules we set and to have regard to any guidance we publish. Although we do not always specify how the subject content should be interpreted, we think it is important for us to be able to do so when there is a good reason for that (for example, if a different interpretation could compromise qualification standards or comparability).
- 2.5 We see no reason to take a different approach for sociology. We are therefore proposing that we should introduce a Condition which requires exam boards to:
- comply with the requirements (and have regard to any guidance) set out in the subject content;
  - comply with any requirements (and have regard to any guidance) we publish on interpreting the subject content; and
  - comply with our assessment objectives (and have regard to our guidance on those assessment objectives).

**Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce a Condition which requires exam boards to comply with the relevant subject content and assessment objectives?**

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-sociology>

## Guidance on assessment objectives

- 2.6 For all other new GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, we have published guidance which explains how exam boards should interpret our assessment objectives. This is designed to ensure exam boards have a common understanding of – and take a consistent approach to targeting – the different assessment objectives.
- 2.7 We are proposing we should introduce similar guidance for GCSE sociology.

**Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce guidance which clarifies how exam boards should interpret our assessment objectives?**

## Rules and guidance for exam assessment

- 2.8 In a number of other new GCSE, AS and A level subjects, we have specified rules which cover how specific areas of the subject content should be assessed. We normally do this where we think it is important exam boards take a consistent and comparable approach to assessing an area of content (in terms of the weighting assigned to that content area and/or the types of question used to target it).
- 2.9 For example, the subject content for the new science GCSEs, AS and A levels which have been developed for first teaching from September 2015 and September 2016 include:
- mathematical skills that students should be able to demonstrate; and
  - practical skills that should be indirectly assessed in exams.
- 2.10 In these subjects, either we or the DfE have set minimum proportions of exam marks which must be allocated to these content areas, and we have specified further rules around how they should be assessed.
- 2.11 The subject content for GCSE sociology specifies sociological research methods which students must know and understand.
- 2.12 For GCSE sociology, we believe we should take a similar approach to regulating exam assessments as we have in other subjects. So we are proposing to introduce rules so that exam boards take a consistent approach to assessing sociological research methods in GCSE sociology.

**Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce rules for exam assessment to ensure exam boards take a**

**consistent approach to assessing sociological research methods in GCSE sociology?**

**Assessing research methods in exams**

2.13 The subject content requirements for GCSE sociology specifies the sociological research methods that students must know and understand and be able to apply in the context of the other areas of the subject content.

2.14 We propose that a minimum of 15 per cent of the overall marks for the qualification are allocated to research methods.

2.15 We want to make sure exam boards take a consistent and comparable approach to assessing research methods in their exams. Our expectation is that exams will require students to:

- demonstrate and apply their knowledge and understanding of research methods;
- apply research methods in the context of written questions and problems; and
- analyse and evaluate information in the context of research methods.

2.16 We are therefore proposing to set rules which codify these expectations.

**Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to assessing research methods in exams for GCSE sociology (including the proposed minimum weighting)?**



### 3. Our proposed Conditions and guidance

3.1 As set out above, we are proposing to introduce subject-specific Conditions, requirements and guidance to implement the proposals in this consultation. We set out our proposed Conditions, requirements and guidance below.

#### Proposed Conditions and requirements for GCSE sociology

3.2 We are proposing to introduce the following Conditions and requirements which will apply to all new GCSE qualifications in sociology:

- a Condition covering compliance with subject content and assessment objectives;
- a further enabling Condition which allows us to specify more detailed requirements on assessment;
- our assessment objectives; and
- requirements on assessment which relate to assessing research methods.

<b>Condition GCSE(Sociology)1</b>	<b>Compliance with content requirements</b>
GCSE(Sociology)1.1	<p>In respect of each GCSE Qualification in Sociology which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must –</p> <p>(a) comply with the requirements relating to that qualification set out in the document published by the Secretary of State entitled ‘Sociology GCSE subject content’<sup>6</sup>, document reference DFE-00058-2016,</p> <p>(b) have regard to any recommendations or guidelines relating to that qualification set out in that document, and</p> <p>(c) interpret that document in accordance with any requirements, and having regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.</p>

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-sociology>

GCSE(Sociology)1.2 In respect of each GCSE Qualification in Sociology which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must comply with any requirements, and have regard to any guidance, relating to the objectives to be met by any assessment for that qualification which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

**Condition**

**Assessment**

**GCSE(Sociology)2**

GCSE(Sociology)2.1 An awarding organisation must ensure that in respect of each assessment for a GCSE Qualification in Sociology which it makes available it complies with any requirements, and has regard to any guidance, which may be published by Ofqual and revised from time to time.

**Assessment objectives – GCSE Qualifications in Sociology**

Condition GCSE(Sociology)1.2 allows us to specify requirements relating to the objectives to be met by any assessment for GCSE Qualifications in Sociology.

The assessment objectives set out below constitute requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(Sociology)1.2. Awarding organisations must comply with these requirements in relation to all GCSE Qualifications in Sociology they make available.

	Objective	Weighting
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.	40%
AO2	Apply knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.	40%
AO3	Analyse and evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods in order to construct arguments, make judgements and draw conclusions.	20%

## **Assessment requirements – GCSE Qualifications in Sociology**

Condition GCSE(Sociology)2.1 allows us to specify requirements in relation to assessment for GCSE Qualifications in Sociology.

We set out below our requirements for the purposes of Condition GCSE(Sociology)2.1. Awarding organisations must comply with these requirements in relation to all GCSE Qualifications in Sociology they make available.

### **Assessment of Learners in relation to Research Methods**

The subject content for GCSE Qualifications in Sociology is set out in the document published by the Secretary of State entitled ‘Sociology GCSE subject content’, document reference DFE-00058-2016 (the ‘Content Document’).

Paragraph 7 of the Content Document specifies the sociological research methods that students must know and understand in GCSE Qualifications in sociology (‘Research Methods’).

In designing and setting the assessments for each GCSE Qualification in Sociology which it makes available, or proposes to make available, an awarding organisation must ensure that, taking the assessments for that qualification together –

- (a) Learners’ knowledge and understanding in relation to Research Methods is assessed across assessment objectives AO1, AO2 and AO3, and
- (b) the number of marks used to credit such knowledge and understanding is no less than 15 per cent of the total marks for the qualification.

## **Proposed guidance for GCSE Sociology**

3.3 We are proposing to introduce guidance on assessment objectives which will apply to all new GCSE qualifications in sociology:

### **Guidance on assessment objectives for GCSE Qualifications in Sociology**

Condition GCSE(Sociology)1.2 allows us to specify requirements and guidance relating to assessment objectives for GCSE Qualifications in Sociology.

We published our requirements in relation to assessment objectives in GCSE Subject Level Conditions and Requirements for Sociology, and reproduce them in the table below.

	Objective	Weighting
AO1	Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.	40%
AO2	Apply knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.	40%
AO3	Analyse and evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods in order to construct arguments, make judgements and draw conclusions.	20%

We set out below our guidance for the purposes of Condition GCSE(Sociology)1.2. This guidance explains how we expect awarding organisations to interpret these assessment objectives in terms of:

- the discrete ‘elements’ within each assessment objective and its strands that questions and tasks could target and/or seek to credit – our expectation is that each and every question/task should target or seek to credit at least one of these elements, and may target or seek to credit multiple elements across one or more assessment objectives;
- the coverage expectations, such as in relation to the different elements within each assessment objective and how those elements should be sampled over time; and
- the key areas of emphasis in each assessment objective and the particular meaning for the subject of any key terms and phrases used; defined terms are shown in bold text, followed by their definitions.

In line with the obligations set out in Condition GCSE(Sociology)1.2, we expect awarding organisations to be able to demonstrate how they have had regard to this guidance. For example, an awarding organisation could map how it has regard to the guidance as it:

- develops its sample assessment materials;
- delivers the qualification;

- develops and applies its approach to sampling the elements into which the assessment objectives are divided; and
- monitors the qualification to make sure it addresses all elements appropriately.

AO1: Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.			40%
Strands	Elements	Coverage	Interpretations and Definitions
n/a	1a - Demonstrate knowledge of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Full coverage in each set of assessments<sup>7</sup> (but not in every assessment)</li> <li>■ A reasonable balance between the elements within this assessment objective.</li> <li>■ Awarding organisations should justify the balance between elements 1a and 1b in their assessment strategies.</li> <li>■ No more than 10% of the total marks for the qualification should reward demonstrating knowledge in isolation.<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods</b> are aspects of the subject content. Individual questions/tasks would not necessarily assess theories, concepts, evidence and methods together. An awarding organisation should explain in its assessment strategy its approach to targeting them as part of sampling the subject content.</li> </ul>
	1b - Demonstrate understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.		

<sup>7</sup> For the purposes of this guidance, a ‘set of assessments’ means the assessments to be taken by a particular Learner for a GCSE Qualification in Sociology. For clarity, the assessments taken by Learners may vary, depending on any possible routes through the qualification.

<sup>8</sup> Marks which ‘reward demonstrating knowledge in isolation’ means any mark awarded solely for recalling facts or other knowledge. It does not include marks awarded for selecting appropriate knowledge (for example, to evidence an argument), or for applying knowledge to a particular context.

AO2: Apply knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods.			40%
Strands	Elements	Coverage	Interpretations and Definitions
n/a	<p>1a - Apply knowledge and understanding of sociological theories, concepts and evidence.</p> <hr/> <p>1b - Apply knowledge and understanding of sociological methods.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)</li> <li>■ A reasonable balance between the elements within this assessment objective.</li> <li>■ Awarding organisations should justify the balance between elements 1a and 1b in their assessment strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ <b>Sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods</b> are aspects of the subject content. Individual questions/tasks would not necessarily assess theories, concepts, evidence and methods together. An awarding organisation should explain in its assessment strategy its approach to targeting them as part of sampling the subject content.</li> <li>■ In the context of this assessment objective, issues could range from specific, real-world examples to more conceptual, esoteric debates.</li> </ul>

AO3: Analyse and evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods in order to construct arguments, make judgements and draw conclusions.			20%
Strands	Elements	Coverage	Interpretations and Definitions
n/a	<p>1a - Analyse sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods in order to construct arguments.</p> <p>1b - Evaluate sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods in order to make judgements and draw conclusions.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Full coverage in each set of assessments (but not in every assessment)</li> <li>■ A reasonable balance between the elements within this assessment objective.</li> <li>■ Awarding organisations should justify the balance between elements 1a and 1b in their assessment strategies.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Sociological theories, concepts, evidence and methods</b> are aspects of the subject content. Individual questions/tasks would not necessarily assess theories, concepts, evidence and methods together. An awarding organisation should explain in its assessment strategy its approach to targeting them as part of sampling the subject content.</li> <li>■ In the context of this assessment objective –             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ <b>Analyse</b> means deconstructing information and/or issues to find connections and provide logical chains of reasoning,</li> <li>□ <b>Evaluate</b> means appraising and/or ascribing value to information and/or issues, and</li> <li>□ analysis and evaluation should draw on underpinning knowledge and understanding</li> </ul> </li> <li>■ Responses might not necessarily come to a definitive conclusion as it may not be possible to do this in relation to some issues.</li> </ul>



**Questions on proposed Conditions, requirements and guidance**

**Question 5: Do you have any comments on our proposed Conditions and requirements for GCSE sociology?**

**Question 6: Do you have any comments on our proposed guidance for GCSE sociology?**

## 4. Equality impact analysis

### Ofqual's role, objectives and duties

4.1 We are subject to the public sector equality duty. We have set out in Appendix B how this duty interacts with our statutory objectives and other duties.

### Equality impact analysis relating to proposed changes to GCSE sociology

4.2 We have considered the potential impact on students who share protected characteristics<sup>9</sup> of the application of the principles and features that will apply to all new GCSE qualifications. Our equality impact analyses for our earlier consultations on GCSE<sup>10</sup> reform are therefore of interest and we encourage you to read them.

4.3 Issues concerning the proposed subject content have been considered by the DfE, who have published their own Equalities Impact Analysis on their subject content proposals.<sup>11</sup>

4.4 We have also previously considered the potential impact on students who share protected characteristics of our decisions on assessment arrangements for this subject.<sup>12</sup>

4.5 We do not repeat here all of the evidence we have considered, as this can be found in our earlier reports. We focus instead on the specific issues that arise from the new proposals in this consultation, and from the way in which we are implementing our previous policy decisions.

4.6 We have not identified any additional negative impacts on students who share protected characteristics which would result from the proposals in this consultation (beyond those that we and the DfE have already identified in our earlier reports).

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<sup>9</sup> For the purposes of the public sector equality duty, the protected characteristics are disability, racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sex, sexual orientation, gender reassignment.

<sup>10</sup> <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20141031163546/http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/gcse-reform-june-2013/category/8-equality-impact-analysis/>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/448676/Reformed\\_GCSE\\_and\\_A\\_level\\_subject\\_content\\_consultation.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/448676/Reformed_GCSE_and_A_level_subject_content_consultation.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/development-of-new-gcses-and-a-levels-for-teaching-from-2017>

- 4.7 During this consultation, we will continue to seek and consider evidence and feedback to our proposals that might help us identify any potential subject-specific impacts on students who share a protected characteristic.
- 4.8 Exam boards are required to consider the accessibility of their qualifications at the design stage and to remove any unjustifiable barriers.

**Question 7: We have not identified any ways in which the proposals for GCSE sociology would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic.<sup>13</sup> Are there any potential impacts we have not identified?**

**Question 8: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?**

**Question 9: Do you have any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on students who share a protected characteristic?**

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<sup>13</sup> 'Protected characteristic' is defined in the Equality Act 2010. Here, it means disability, racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

## Appendix A: Regulatory tools

### Comparability and innovation

Exam boards operate in a market. They can design and deliver their qualifications in different ways, within the parameters we set. This provides some choice to schools or colleges, which is one of the benefits of a qualifications market. Exam boards must, however, make sure that the levels of attainment indicated by their qualifications are comparable to those of other exam boards' versions of the qualifications. The exam boards cooperate in a range of ways to make sure that the standards of their respective qualifications are comparable. To make sure standards are maintained and comparability is secured, we review GCSE qualifications before they can be made available, by applying an accreditation requirement to the qualifications, and we oversee the awarding of GCSE qualifications.

We do not wish to close down opportunities for exam boards to design and deliver their qualifications in different ways. Indeed, we have a statutory duty to have regard to the desirability of facilitating innovation in connection with the provision of regulated qualifications and a statutory objective with regard to the efficiency with which the qualifications market works. If we adopt a regulatory approach in which all aspects of a qualification are very tightly defined, we could effectively remove scope for exam boards to distinguish their qualifications from others and stop choice for schools or colleges. On the other hand, if exam boards have too much scope to vary their approach their qualifications might not be comparable.

In striking a balance, we use a range of tools to regulate qualifications and the exam boards that provide them. The main regulatory tools we use for the qualifications in this consultation are explained below.

### Conditions of Recognition

Exam boards must comply at all times with our Conditions of Recognition. These are the main regulatory rules that we use. We can take regulatory action against an exam board that breaches or is likely to breach a Condition.

There are three sets of Conditions that will apply to new GCSEs (graded 9 to 1):

- (i) the published *General Conditions of Recognition*<sup>14</sup> that apply to all regulated qualifications;

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<sup>14</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-conditions-of-recognition](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/general-conditions-of-recognition)

- (ii) GCSE (9 to 1) Qualification Level Conditions and Requirements<sup>15</sup> that apply to all new GCSE qualifications;
- (iii) GCSE Subject Level Conditions that apply to new GCSEs (graded 9 to 1) in a specific subject. We are consulting now on draft GCSE Subject Level Conditions for sociology.

## **Regulatory documents**

In some Conditions we refer to published regulatory requirements. We publish these in regulatory documents. The Conditions require exam boards to comply with such documents.

We are consulting on a regulatory document which covers our requirements in relation to assessment of research methods.

The requirements will have effect as if they were part of a Condition. The requirements will be set out in a stand-alone section of the Conditions document, simply because they are technical and detailed so they sit better as separate from, rather than within, the Condition itself.

## **Statutory guidance**

We publish guidance to help exam boards identify the types of behaviour or practices they could use to meet a Condition. Exam boards must have regard to such guidance, but they do not have to follow this guidance in the same way that they must comply with the Conditions; they are free to meet the outcomes of the Conditions in their own ways. An exam board that decides to take a different approach to that set out in our guidance must still be able to show that it is meeting the Condition or Conditions to which the guidance relates.

We are consulting now on draft guidance for new GCSEs in sociology.

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<sup>15</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions)

## Appendix B: Ofqual’s role, objectives and duties

Our statutory objectives include the qualifications standards objective, which is to secure that the qualifications we regulate:

- (a) give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding; and
- (b) indicate:
  - (i) a consistent level of attainment (including over time) between comparable regulated qualifications; and
  - (ii) a consistent level of attainment (but not over time) between qualifications we regulate and comparable qualifications (including those awarded outside the UK) that we do not regulate.

We must therefore regulate so that qualifications properly differentiate between students who have demonstrated that they have the knowledge, skills and understanding required to attain the qualification and those who have not.

We also have a duty under the Apprenticeship, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to have regard to the reasonable requirements of relevant students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities, of employers and of the higher education sector, and to aspects of government policy when so directed by the Secretary of State.

As a public body, we are subject to the public sector equality duty.<sup>16</sup> This duty requires us to have due regard to the need to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited under the Equality Act 2010;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

The exam boards that design, deliver and award GCSE qualifications are required by the Equality Act, among other things, to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people taking their qualifications, except where we have specified that such adjustments should not be made.

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<sup>16</sup> Equality Act 2010, section 149.

When we decide whether such adjustments should not be made, we must have regard to:

- (a) the need to minimise the extent to which disabled persons are disadvantaged in attaining the qualification because of their disabilities;
- (b) the need to secure that the qualification gives a reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of a person upon whom it is conferred;
- (c) the need to maintain public confidence in the qualification.

Legislation therefore sets out a framework within which we must operate. We are subject to a number of duties and we must aim to achieve a number of objectives. These different duties and objectives can, from time to time, conflict with each other. For example, if we regulate to secure that a qualification gives a reliable indication of a student's knowledge, skills and understanding, a student who has not been able to demonstrate the required knowledge, skills and/or understanding will not be awarded the qualification. A person may find it more difficult, or impossible, to demonstrate the required knowledge, skills and/or understanding because they have a protected characteristic. This could put them at a disadvantage relative to others who have been awarded the qualification. It is not always possible for us to regulate so that we can both secure that qualifications give a reliable indication of knowledge, skills and understanding and advance equality between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not. We must review all the available evidence and actively consider all the available options before coming to a final, rational decision.

Qualifications cannot be used to mitigate inequalities or unfairness in the education system or in society more widely that might affect, for example, students' preparedness to take the qualification and the assessments within it. While a wide range of factors can have an impact on a student's ability to achieve a particular mark in an assessment, our influence is limited to the way the qualification is designed and assessed.

We require the exam boards to design qualifications to give a reliable indication of the knowledge, skills and understanding of those on whom they are conferred. We also require the exam boards to avoid, where possible, features of a qualification that could, without justification, make a qualification more difficult for a student to achieve because they have a particular protected characteristic. We require exam boards to monitor whether any features of their qualifications have this effect.

In setting the overall framework within which exam boards will design, assess and award the reformed GCSE, A level and AS qualifications, we want to understand the possible impacts of the proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic.

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are:

- age;
- disability;
- gender reassignment;
- marriage and civil partnerships;
- pregnancy and maternity;
- race;
- religion or belief;
- sex;
- sexual orientation.

It should be noted that with respect to the public sector equality duty under section 149 of the 2010 Act, we are not required to have due regard to impacts on those who are married or in a civil partnership.



## Responding to the consultation

### Your details

To evaluate responses properly, we need to know who is responding to the consultation and in what capacity. We will therefore only consider your response if you complete the following information section.

We will publish our evaluation of responses. Please note that we may publish all or part of your response unless you tell us (in your answer to the confidentiality question) that you want us to treat your response as confidential. If you tell us you wish your response to be treated as confidential, we will not include your details in any published list of respondents, although we may quote from your response anonymously.

Please answer all questions marked with a star\*

Name\*

Position\*

Organisation name (if applicable)\*

Address

Email

Telephone

**Would you like us to treat your response as confidential?\***

If you answer yes, we will not include your details in any list of people or organisations that responded to the consultation.

Yes  No

**Is this a personal response or an official response on behalf of your organisation?\***

Personal response (please answer the question ‘If you ticked “Personal response”...’)

Official response (please answer the question ‘If you ticked “Official response”...’)

**If you ticked “Personal response”, which of the following are you?**

Student

Parent or carer

Teacher (but responding in a personal capacity)

Other, including general public (please state below)

---

**If you ticked “Official response”, please respond accordingly:**

**Type of responding organisation\***

Awarding organisation

Local authority

School or college (please answer the question below)

Academy chain

Private training provider

University or other higher education institution

Employer

Other representative or interest group (please answer the question below)

**School or college type**

- Comprehensive or non-selective academy
  - State selective or selective academy
  - Independent
  - Special school
  - Further education college
  - Sixth form college
  - Other (please state below)
- 

**Type of representative group or interest group**

- Group of awarding organisations
  - Union
  - Employer or business representative group
  - Subject association or learned society
  - Equality organisation or group
  - School, college or teacher representative group
  - Other (please state below)
- 

**Nation\***

- England
- Wales
- Northern Ireland
- Scotland
- Other EU country: \_\_\_\_\_
- Non-EU country: \_\_\_\_\_

**How did you find out about this consultation?**

Our newsletter or another one of our communications

Our website

Internet search

Other

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**May we contact you for further information?**

Yes  No

## Questions

**Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce a Condition which requires exam boards to comply with the relevant subject content and assessment objectives?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

**Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce guidance which clarifies how exam boards should interpret our assessment objectives?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

**Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should introduce rules for exam assessment to ensure exam boards take a consistent approach to assessing sociological research methods in GCSE sociology?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

**Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposed approach to assessing research methods in exams for GCSE sociology (including the proposed minimum weighting)?**

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neither agree nor disagree
- Disagree
- Strongly disagree

Please explain your reasons:

.....

.....

.....

**Question 5: Do you have any comments on our proposed Conditions and requirements for GCSE sociology?**

- Yes  No

.....

.....

.....  
**Question 6: Do you have any comments on our proposed guidance for GCSE sociology?**

Yes  No

.....  
.....  
.....

**Question 7: We have not identified any ways in which the proposals for GCSE sociology would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic.<sup>17</sup> Are there any potential impacts we have not identified?**

Yes  No

.....  
.....  
.....

**Question 8: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?**

Yes  No

.....  
.....  
.....

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<sup>17</sup> 'Protected characteristic' is defined in the Equality Act 2010. Here, it means disability, racial group, age, religion or belief, pregnancy or maternity, sex, sexual orientation and gender reassignment.

**Question 9: Do you have any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on students who share a protected characteristic?**

Yes  No

.....

.....

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## Accessibility of our consultations

We want our consultations to be read and understood by as many people as possible. We would appreciate it if you could spare a few moments to answer the following questions.

**We want to write clearly, directly and put the reader first. Overall, do you think we have got this right in this consultation?**

Yes  No

**Do you have any comments or suggestions about the style of writing?**

Yes  No

.....

.....

.....

**How many of our consultations have you read in the last 12 months?**

1

2

3

4

5

More than 5

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us at [publications@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:publications@ofqual.gov.uk) if you have any specific accessibility requirements.



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