

The New GCE A Level Examinations

Findings from the Monitoring of the New
Qualifications in 2010



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Executive summary

In 2010, the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) monitored a sample of the new GCE A level qualifications offered by the three England-based unitary awarding organisations: AQA, Edexcel and OCR. The six subjects addressed were: English Literature and Geography for AQA; Physics and Spanish for Edexcel; and Design and Technology, and History for OCR. These new qualifications were for first teaching from September 2008.

The main structural changes that were made to the A level qualifications as a whole were:

- a reduction in the number of units for most subjects from three to two
- the inclusion of coursework only where it is the soundest method of assessment
- the introduction of greater stretch and challenge in the assessments for A2 units
- the introduction of an A* grade at overall subject level.

As part of our overall work to set and maintain standards in the new A level qualifications, we reviewed the outcomes of awarding before results were published, including the outcomes for the new A* grade. We were satisfied that consistent standards had been applied and that candidates could have confidence that results in 2010 were in line with results from 2009.

As part of our scrutiny programme, we considered the assessments for the A2 units of the new A level qualifications. Although we identified a number of general issues, these tended not to be evident for each qualification that was monitored. For the written papers, the issues related primarily to level of demand, coverage of assessment objectives, clarity of question requirements and quality of mark schemes. For the other forms of assessment, they related primarily to quality of marking criteria and comparability of optional routes. We will ensure that awarding organisations address these issues for future examination series.

However, in general, we concluded that these new specifications and their assessments were appropriately demanding for A2, with suitable progression from AS evident, as well as presenting a suitable degree of stretch and challenge. There were appropriate opportunities in most cases for candidates of different levels of ability to demonstrate, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. In general, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were in line with expectations based on the published performance descriptions and subject experts' professional judgements.

Introduction

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Our work ensures that learners get the results that their work deserves, that standards are maintained and that qualifications are correctly valued and understood, both now and in the future.

The awarding organisations that offer GCSE and GCE A level qualifications operate within a clear regulatory framework, which is set out in the following documents:

- *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293; 2004) ([www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/6944_regulatory_criteria_04\(1\).pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/6944_regulatory_criteria_04(1).pdf))
- *GCSE, GCE, principal learning and project code of practice* (Ofqual/10/4718; 2010) (www.ofqual.gov.uk/for-awarding-organisations/96-articles/247-codes-of-practice-2010).

We carry out a programme of monitoring activities each year to assess the performance of awarding organisations against the requirements of key sections of the code of practice. One of these activities is the scrutiny programme. This is an in-depth study of the examination process across a sample of qualifications being offered by the different awarding organisations each year.

The scrutiny of a qualification aims to:

- determine whether the required qualification criteria and associated code of practice have been met
- determine whether the assessments were fair and effective in measuring achievement by candidates in respect of the stated assessment objectives
- determine whether the procedures designed to ensure consistency of practice and comparability of standards were implemented effectively
- identify any aspects of the specification(s) that appear to have constrained fair, effective and reliable examinations
- identify any good practice that is worthy of encouragement and dissemination, to promote continuing improvement in the quality of examinations.

Each scrutiny involves a team of subject experts, who observe meetings held by the awarding organisation relating to the various stages of the examinations process. They then analyse question papers, mark schemes and coursework tasks, review a sample of candidates' work to determine whether it is in line with expectations, and consider a range of additional information.

Following each scrutiny, we report to the awarding organisation, indicating how, if necessary, it should improve its provision. The awarding organisation produces an action plan in response that details how and when any issues will be addressed and we then monitor how effectively they implement that action plan.

Monitoring the new qualifications

In 2010, we carried out scrutinies of a sample of the new GCE A level qualifications offered by the three England-based unitary awarding organisations: AQA, Edexcel and OCR.¹

The six subjects addressed were: English Literature and Geography for AQA; Physics and Spanish for Edexcel; and Design and Technology, and History for OCR. Since the qualifications monitored were chosen to address a wide range of subjects, they varied considerably in the nature of their assessment requirements and this report does not attempt to compare them in these terms. Summaries of the schemes of assessment for the different specifications are provided in Appendix A.

The A level qualification comprises AS together with A2 units. The units that comprise AS are assessed at the standard expected for a learner halfway through an A level course; the A2 units are assessed at the standard expected for a learner at the end of an A level course.

Our scrutinies in 2010 of these A level qualifications focused only on the A2 units, since equivalent scrutinies in 2009 had addressed the AS units. The findings from the 2009 AS scrutiny programme are available on our website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/Ofqual-10-4717-new-GCE-AS-level-qualifications-report-03-2010.pdf).

¹ Action plans in relation to these scrutinies are currently being developed by the awarding organisations and will be finalised with Ofqual in spring 2011.

Qualification structure

This section provides background information about the general structure of GCE A level qualifications, as well as information about the main changes in the new qualifications that were monitored.

Background information

To regulate the quality and standard of A level qualifications, the regulators establish criteria for the development of specifications by awarding organisations. Individual specifications have to meet these criteria to be accredited.

Qualification criteria set out the overall structure as well as the assessment and grading requirements. The GCE AS and A level qualification criteria (February 2007) are provided in Appendix B.

For subjects offered by more than one awarding organisation, specific subject criteria set out the essential knowledge, understanding and skills for all of the qualifications in the particular subject. These criteria provide the framework within which each awarding organisation creates the detail of their specification. They also help to ensure comparability between different qualifications. The subject criteria for the qualifications monitored as part of the 2010 scrutiny programme are available on our website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualification-and-assessment-framework/89-articles/14-a-and-as-level-criteria).

For each A level qualification, the subject criteria include assessment objectives. These statements define the focus of the assessment in each subject, for example, the types of knowledge, understanding and skills that candidates are required to demonstrate. In some cases, the individual assessment objectives may be divided into a number of different 'strands'. Since the assessment objectives form part of the subject criteria, they are common to all of the qualifications in a given subject. This helps to ensure comparability of requirements. The units that comprise an A level qualification must each target one or more of the assessment objectives for the subject. The weighting of assessment objectives refers to the proportions in which they are targeted, both within individual units and within the specification as a whole.

For each A level qualification, there is also a set of performance descriptions. These are available on our website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualification-and-assessment-framework/89-articles/14-a-and-as-level-criteria). The performance descriptions indicate the typical performance of candidates at the A/B and E/U grade boundaries. They relate to the specific assessment objectives for a subject and apply to the qualification as a whole rather than to individual units and particular specifications. However, to be in line with expectations, the candidates' work produced for individual units and particular specifications would need to reflect broadly the learning outcomes and levels of attainment indicated in the performance descriptions.

The units that comprise an A level qualification may be assessed through written papers or through other forms of assessment such as coursework, as defined in the relevant subject criteria.

The types of question used in written papers generally vary according to the subject. For example, subjects such as English Literature and History largely require candidates to produce extended responses to a small number of essay questions. On the other hand, subjects such as Geography and Physics tend to require candidates to address a larger number of structured questions requiring responses of varying lengths.

Similarly, the requirements of other forms of assessment often vary according to the subject. For example, subjects such as English Literature may require candidates to produce a coursework portfolio of extended writing, whereas subjects such as Physics may require candidates to report on practical coursework such as experiments they have completed.

In some cases, candidates and their centres have an element of choice about the assessments that comprise a qualification. For example, they might choose between topics within a unit and/or between questions in a written paper. To ensure fairness to all candidates, awarding organisations must ensure that the requirements of these different optional routes are comparably demanding.

For each assessment, there is an associated mark scheme (or set of marking criteria) that details how credit should be awarded. Typically, this characterises acceptable responses and indicates the amount of credit that different responses attract. The structure of mark schemes varies depending on the nature of the subject and on the nature of the assessment.

In some cases, mark schemes focus primarily on the accuracy of responses, ie whether the material provided by candidates is correct. This tends to be the case for assessments addressing factual content, in which any response is usually either correct or incorrect, and there is only limited scope for a response to be partially correct.

In other cases, mark schemes focus both on the accuracy of the material included and on the quality of the response, ie how effectively candidates have used the material available to them. In such cases, where responses can be made at a range of different levels, mark schemes are often composed of a series of bands, each worth a range of marks and with a statement describing the typical quality of the response at that level. In these cases, they also tend to include some indicative content, which suggests the type of material that responses may contain.

There are also cases where mark schemes focus primarily on the quality of responses. This tends to be for assessments addressing different forms of skill and these mark schemes usually comprise a series of qualitative mark bands, as above.

It is important that all forms of assessment for a qualification differentiate effectively. This means candidates, whatever their ability level, should all have the *opportunity to demonstrate* what they know, understand and can do in terms of the subject. For example, less able candidates should be able to access some of the marks available, while more able candidates should be able to access most of the marks available, and this should be based appropriately on their differing levels of ability in the subject.

It is also important that the assessments for a qualification discriminate effectively. This means candidates with different levels of ability should all be *credited reliably* for what they know, understand and can do. For example, candidates should be divided appropriately, based on their ability in the subject, and using the full range of marks available.

Changes in the new qualifications

The new A level qualifications were available for first teaching from September 2008. They were introduced following the review by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority of the AS and A level qualification and subject criteria in 2005. The main structural changes made to the qualifications as a whole were:

- a reduction in the number of units for most full A level subjects from six to four to reduce the assessment burden on candidates and create the scope for greater stretch and challenge in the assessments for A2 units (though there were exceptions to this reduction, such as Biology, Chemistry, Music and Physics)
- the inclusion of coursework only where it is the soundest method of assessment (in line with this change, optional coursework was largely removed from AS and A level qualifications)
- the introduction of greater stretch and challenge in the assessments for A2 units (through, for example, a wider range of question types, more questions requiring extended responses and a greater emphasis on synoptic assessment)

- the introduction of an A* grade at A level (for candidates achieving a grade A overall at A level and also achieving 90 per cent or more of the maximum uniform marks on the A2 units overall).²

The summary below shows the main structural changes in the A2 units of the A level qualifications that were monitored.

| Qualification | Previous structure | New structure |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| AQA English Literature | Three units: <i>either</i> three written papers <i>or</i> two written papers plus one coursework | Two units: one written paper plus one coursework |
| AQA Geography | Three units: <i>either</i> three written papers <i>or</i> two written papers plus one coursework | Two units: both written papers |
| Edexcel Physics | Three units: two written papers plus one written test and one practical test | Three units: two written papers plus one coursework |
| Edexcel Spanish | Three units: <i>either</i> four written papers plus one speaking test <i>or</i> three written papers plus one coursework plus one speaking test | Two units: one written paper plus one speaking test |
| OCR Design and Technology | Three units: two coursework plus one written paper | Two units: one coursework plus one written paper |
| OCR History | Three units: two written papers plus one coursework | Two units: <i>either</i> one written paper plus one coursework (specification A) <i>or</i> one controlled assessment plus one coursework (specification B) |

² Uniform marks are a means of ensuring that candidates' performance can be compared reliably across different qualifications and over time. Further information about the uniform mark scale is available on the Ofqual website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/A-levelGuide.pdf).

Written papers

Candidates were required to complete one written paper for each of AQA English Literature A and B, Edexcel Spanish, OCR Design and Technology, and OCR History A. Candidates were required to complete two written papers for each of AQA Geography and Edexcel Physics. Each of the written papers was marked externally by the awarding organisation.

Summary of findings

In general, the written papers were clear and well presented, and were appropriately demanding for A2, with a suitable degree of stretch and challenge, as well as suitable progression from AS, generally evident. The written papers tended to reflect the requirements of the sample assessment materials and optional routes tended to be comparable in their requirements. There were appropriate opportunities in most cases for candidates of different levels of ability to demonstrate, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. Overall, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were in line with expectations based on the published performance descriptions and subject experts' professional judgements, and were of a comparable standard across optional routes. However, there were issues regarding some aspects of the written papers.

Level of demand

In several instances, the written papers did not provide appropriate opportunities for the full range of candidates to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do.

For AQA English Literature A, the requirements of the written paper for unit LITA3 were demanding given its duration. (Candidates were required to respond to two questions, each of which required the close analysis of two extracts, as well as appropriate reference to three texts from their wider reading.) The inherently demanding nature of this written paper may have been exacerbated by the unseen extracts that had been selected, which, taken as a whole, were more demanding than those from the sample assessment materials.

For AQA English Literature B, a small number of optional questions for section A of the written paper for unit LITB3 were not appropriately demanding for A2. This issue led to a lack of comparability in the requirements of the optional routes in this unit.

For AQA Geography, there were a small number of instances for unit GEO4A where questions in the written paper were not appropriately demanding. In one case, the demand was excessive owing to a challenging geographical technique being addressed; the demanding nature of this was increased both by the complicated wording of the question as well as by the complexity and layout of the resources. In

another case, the demand was insufficient owing to the subject content not representing an appropriate degree of progression from AS.

For Edexcel Physics, the written papers for units 6PH04 and 6PH05 did not include a sufficient degree of synoptic assessment or stretch and challenge. There were also only relatively limited opportunities in these written papers for candidates to be credited for extended responses.

Coverage of assessment objectives

In two instances, the coverage of assessment objectives in the written papers was not in line with that intended.

For AQA English Literature B, the wording of the questions in each section of the written paper for unit LITB3 did not reflect the equal weighting of the four assessment objectives. The questions did not generally target the assessment objectives explicitly, while in some cases the nature of the questions did not enable candidates to demonstrate them.

For AQA Geography, the open-ended nature of the questions in the written papers for units GEO4A and GEO4B led to candidates producing responses that were not in line with those anticipated by the mark schemes. This included demonstrating the assessment objectives in proportions that were not in line with those targeted.

Clarity of question requirements

In several instances, the requirements of questions were not clear enough to candidates.

For AQA Geography, the requirements of the optional routes for section A of the written paper for unit GEOG3 were not entirely comparable. This was owing both to the poor quality of one of the resources used and the differing natures of the resources (some, for example, being text-based and some photographic). Equally, for units GEO4A and GEO4B, there were a number of questions in the written papers that did not make sufficiently clear to candidates what they were required to do in order to be credited according to the mark scheme.

For Edexcel Physics, the written papers for units 6PH04 and 6PH05 indicated to candidates the questions in which their quality of written communication would be assessed. However, they did not indicate the specific parts of these questions to which this would apply.

For Edexcel Spanish, the written paper for unit 6SP04 did not make it sufficiently clear to candidates for some of the questions in section B that the mark scheme required them to present both sides of an argument.

Quality of mark schemes

In several instances, the mark schemes for the written papers were not clear and detailed enough to be applied consistently by examiners.

For AQA English Literature A and B, the mark schemes for units LITA3 and LITB3 did not provide examiners with sufficient guidance regarding marking responses that did not demonstrate evenly the four equally-weighted assessment objectives. For unit LITA3, the mark scheme comprised only four bands to address 40 marks. The resultant width of these bands meant that there was the potential for examiners not to apply the mark scheme accurately and consistently. Although the indicative content in this mark scheme provided a detailed analysis of the unseen extracts, the guidance in relation to typical candidate responses to these was comparatively brief. For unit LITB3, the indicative content provided in the mark scheme was limited, both in terms of the question focus and in relation to the typical responses that might be anticipated from candidates.

For AQA Geography, the marking grid for section C of unit GEOG3 did not include sufficient detail regarding how the marking criteria were weighted or how they were linked to the assessment objectives. Furthermore, in some cases, the mark scheme for this unit did not provide sufficient guidance regarding the expected quality of response required for certain mark levels.

For Edexcel Physics, the mark schemes for units 6PH04 and 6PH05 did not always include a full list of acceptable responses to ensure that candidates would be credited appropriately.

For Edexcel Spanish, the mark scheme for the *Reading, research and understanding* element of AO2 for section C of unit 6SP04 consisted of five relatively wide mark bands. The descriptions of these marking levels were not sufficiently detailed, with differentiation between the levels evident only through a relatively small number of adjectives (eg *adequate understanding* and *some evidence of reading and research*). The mark scheme for this section was also complicated owing to it using one marking grid to assess two different elements of candidates' responses. (These elements were their understanding in relation to the question focus as well as the evidence of their reading and research.)

For OCR History A, the mark scheme for unit F966 had a large number of mark levels, which varied in size. The progression between these was often unclear since it was indicated through adjectives that could be interpreted as fairly similar in meaning (eg *general* and *satisfactory*).

Next steps

We require the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. We will monitor the

implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately. Although these action plans are currently at a preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has already outlined a range of intended actions.

For English Literature A and B, AQA will:

- review the mark schemes for units LITA3 and LITB3 in future examination series to ensure that they address the targeted assessment objectives appropriately and monitor their application to ensure that this is consistent and provides effective discrimination of performance.

For Geography, AQA will:

- ensure in future examination series (from January 2012 onwards) that resources used in written papers for unit GEOG3 are of appropriate quality and that optional routes are comparable in their requirements
- ensure in future examination series that mark schemes for unit GEOG3 provide appropriately detailed guidance regarding the quality of response required for particular mark levels
- ensure in future examination series (from January 2012 onwards) that questions in written papers for unit GEO4A are appropriate in terms of their wording and the layout of their resources, and represent an appropriate degree of progression from AS
- ensure in future examination series that mark schemes for units GEO4A and GEO4B do not include requirements that differ from those of the related questions.

For Physics, Edexcel will:

- ensure in future examination series (from January 2012 onwards) that written papers for units 6PH04 and 6PH05 incorporate a greater degree of synoptic assessment and require candidates to produce more extended responses.

For Spanish, Edexcel will:

- ensure in future examination series that the mark scheme for unit 6SP04 is in line with the question requirements.

For History A, OCR will:

- monitor the operation of the mark scheme for unit F966 in the winter 2011 examination series and consider any amendments required for future examination series in the light of the findings from this work.

Other assessments

Candidates were required to complete one coursework unit for each of AQA English Literature A and B, Edexcel Physics, OCR Design and Technology, and OCR History A and B. Candidates were required to complete one speaking test for Edexcel Spanish and one controlled assessment for OCR History B.³ The coursework units for AQA English Literature A and B, and OCR Design and Technology were marked internally by the centre and moderated externally by the awarding organisation. The speaking test for Edexcel Spanish and the controlled assessment for OCR History B were marked externally by the awarding organisation. The coursework unit for Edexcel Physics was either marked internally by the centre and moderated externally by Edexcel or marked externally by Edexcel.

Summary of findings

In general, the assessments were clear and well presented, and were appropriately demanding for A2, with a suitable degree of stretch and challenge, as well as suitable progression from AS, generally evident. Where relevant, optional routes tended to be comparable in their requirements. There were appropriate opportunities in most cases for candidates of different levels of ability to demonstrate, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. Overall, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were in line with expectations based on the published performance descriptions and subject experts' professional judgements, and were of a comparable standard across optional routes. However, there were issues regarding some aspects of the assessments.

Quality of marking criteria

In several instances, there were issues regarding the marking criteria for the assessments. These issues included:

- their clarity
- the extent to which they were conducive to being applied consistently by assessors and moderators
- their level of demand
- their potential to discriminate appropriately
- their correspondence to the assessment and specification

³ Candidates completed the speaking test and the controlled assessment under examination conditions.

- the provision of relevant information to centres.

For AQA English Literature A, the marking criteria for unit LITA4 comprised only four bands to address 70 marks. The resultant width of these bands meant that there was the potential for centres and moderators not to apply the marking criteria accurately and consistently.

For Edexcel Physics, some of the individual marking criteria for unit 6PH06 were not sufficiently demanding to discriminate appropriately across the different performance levels of candidates. In some cases, the allocation of only one mark to each of the individual marking criteria (irrespective of their demand) meant that they could not always take enough account of the quality of candidates' responses – for example, significantly differing levels of response may gain the same credit. Although a set of further explanatory comments had been developed for marking and moderation – which improved the clarity and level of detail in the marking criteria – these had not been available to centres, so centres would not have been aware, in designing and marking assessments, how the criteria were to be applied. Since a similar issue had been evident for AS in 2009, we have recently agreed with Edexcel a range of measures to address this for future examination series.

For Edexcel Spanish, there was insufficient opportunity for unit 6SP03 for candidates to respond to extended and detailed spoken language given the number of marks allocated in the marking criteria to the *Response* element of AO1 (20 out of 50) and the *Comprehension and development* element of AO1 (16 out of 50).

For OCR Design and Technology, the marking criteria for unit F523 allocated a large proportion of marks (57 out of 120) for one particular criterion. There were only three marking levels for this criterion, each of which therefore contained an inappropriately large number of marks. The descriptions in the marking levels were not sufficiently detailed and differentiation between the levels was evident only through a small number of adjectives (eg *high*, *adequate* and *limited*). Although centres were required to complete a grid to explain how the mark for this criterion had been derived, the scale used in this grid was not sufficiently precise.

For OCR History A, the marking criteria for unit F965 had a large number of mark levels that varied in size, while the progression between these was often unclear since it was indicated through adjectives that could be interpreted as fairly similar in meaning (eg *general* and *satisfactory*).

For OCR History B, the marking criteria for unit F987 did not make sufficiently clear the relative weightings of the *Research diary* and *Personal study*. They also indicated that candidates would be assessed in relation to sources *and* interpretations, while the specification stated sources *and/or* interpretations.

Comparability of optional routes

In the case of Edexcel Physics, there was some variation in the performance of candidates of similar levels of ability across the two assessment routes for unit 6PH06. This was addressed by the awarding organisation making a compensatory mark adjustment for the summer 2010 examination series. Since a similar issue had been evident for AS in 2009, we have recently agreed with Edexcel a range of measures to address this for future examination series.

Next steps

We require the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. We will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately. Although these action plans are currently at a preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has already outlined a range of intended actions.

For English Literature A and B, AQA will:

- review the marking criteria for unit LITA4 on the basis that in practice each of the four bands is divided into a notional upper and lower section for marking and moderation.

For Physics, Edexcel will:

- review the content and structure of the marking criteria for unit 6PH06
- introduce a range of measures to improve the comparability of the marking and moderation of the assessment routes for unit 6PH06.

For Spanish, Edexcel will:

- provide feedback to centres and examiners for unit 6SP03 to ensure that candidates are given appropriate opportunities to respond to extended and detailed spoken language.

For Design and Technology, OCR will:

- revise the marking criteria for unit F523 so that the level descriptions are appropriately detailed
- revise the grid used by centres to mark unit F523 so that its layout and scale are appropriate.

For History A, OCR will:

- monitor the operation of the marking criteria for unit F965 in the winter 2011 examination series and consider any amendments required for future examination series in the light of the findings from this work.

For History B, OCR will:

- inform centres of the relative weightings for unit F987 of the *Research Diary* and *Personal Study*
- review the specification and marking criteria for unit F987 to address any potential inconsistency between them regarding the nature of this assessment.

Stretch and challenge

One of the main changes in the new A level qualifications available for first teaching from September 2008 was the inclusion of a greater degree of stretch and challenge in the assessments for the A2 units. (This change reflected the stretch and challenge agenda that had been detailed in a DfEs White Paper that reviewed 14–19 qualifications.)

The new stretch and challenge requirements were presented as general principles rather than addressing particular aspects of subject content. In summary, they were:

- a broad range of question types to ensure that a wide range of skills is assessed
- an extended writing requirement to give students the opportunity to demonstrate the full breadth and depth of their knowledge and understanding
- synoptic assessment that will test students' understanding of the subject as a whole and their ability to make links between different areas of the subject.

A key focus of the 2010 scrutiny programme was the consideration of the degree of stretch and challenge that was present in the assessments for the new A2 units. The teams of subject experts that analysed question papers, mark schemes and coursework tasks were briefed accordingly and provided a range of evidence regarding how well awarding organisations had addressed the new requirements.

In general, the subject experts concluded that the A2 assessments contained an appropriate degree of stretch and challenge. Summaries are provided below of the ways in which the A2 specifications that were monitored incorporated stretch and challenge, thereby ensuring that they gave scope for the full range of candidates – including the most able – to demonstrate and be credited for what they knew, understood and could do.

AQA English Literature A and B

In both of the A2 units for each specification, the tasks that candidates must complete require them to produce extended responses that address the higher-level skills of synthesis, comparative exploration of texts and close analysis of form, structure and language. Candidates are rewarded for their ability to demonstrate synoptically the knowledge, understanding and skills that they have developed through reading widely and independently across different contexts.

The written paper for unit LITA3 requires candidates to produce sustained analyses of four previously unseen texts. These analyses must also include comparative

references to at least three additional texts from the candidate's wider reading across mode (ie prose, poetry and drama), genre, period and gender.

The coursework for unit LITA4 requires candidates to produce an extensive comparative response regarding three texts, one of which must be a play by Shakespeare.

The written paper for unit LITB3 requires candidates to produce extended responses to open-ended questions addressing one of two conceptual genres (*Elements of the Gothic* and/or *Elements of the Pastoral*). One of the two extended responses required involves candidates making connections between at least three texts that they have studied, including exploration of the contexts in which these were written.

The coursework for unit LITB4 requires candidates to produce a comparative study of two texts, as well as a response applying an aspect of a pre-released anthology of critical and literary theories to an additional text or texts.

AQA Geography

In each of the A2 units, the tasks that candidates must complete require them to produce extended responses, in some cases to questions that are of an open-ended nature. Candidates are rewarded for their ability to demonstrate a range of skills, including statistical analysis, data response and synthesis of information.

The written paper for unit GEOG3 requires candidates to demonstrate analysis, discussion and evaluation skills in relation to a range of physical and human geography topics.

The written paper for unit GEO4A requires candidates to use and deploy appropriately their geographical fieldwork experience in responding to a series of related questions.

The written paper for unit GEO4B requires candidates to analyse, evaluate and draw together elements of their conceptual understanding of both physical and human geography in relation to a range of resources.

Edexcel Physics

In each of the A2 units, the tasks that candidates must complete require them to demonstrate their detailed knowledge and understanding of physical principles. Candidates are rewarded for applying their understanding to the solution of quantitative problems and for qualitative explanations of physical phenomena. These often arise in unfamiliar contexts and in some cases require a more extended response.

The written papers for units 6PH04 and 6PH05 require candidates to respond to a range of question types (primarily objective test and structured questions), as well as to engage with interesting and unusual contexts in addressing the unit content from the specification.

The coursework for unit 6PH06 requires candidates to carry out a scientific investigation, which provides the opportunity for them to demonstrate their practical and analytical skills, as well as their ability to communicate effectively.

Edexcel Spanish

In both of the A2 units, the tasks that candidates must complete require them to demonstrate integrated language skills as well as knowledge, understanding and application of the grammar and syntax of the language. Candidates are rewarded for advanced research and reading skills, as well as for the ability to analyse, make connections and use the language accurately and creatively.

The speaking test for unit 6SP03 requires candidates to demonstrate higher-level language skills by using debate and argument to present, discuss and take a clear stance on an issue that they have researched independently.

The written paper for unit 6SP04 requires candidates to employ a range of language skills in order to complete a translation exercise into Spanish, produce an extended essay on a previously unknown topic and produce a further extended response based on their own research. This unit requires higher-level manipulation of the language as well as in-depth research into a chosen aspect of the culture and society of a Spanish-speaking country, countries or community.

OCR Design and Technology

In both of the A2 units, the tasks that candidates must complete require them to respond holistically as well as to use an appropriate toolkit of techniques, concepts and theories. Candidates are rewarded for independent performance across a range of contexts (both familiar and unfamiliar), as well as for their ability to provide evidence that they can think as designers and respond to a range of different needs and situations.

The coursework for unit F523 requires candidates to bring together all of the knowledge, understanding and skills that they have developed and to experiment with product design and manufacturing techniques in order to respond to challenges innovatively.

The written papers for unit F524 require candidates to produce extended written responses and to generate immediate solutions, based on their own knowledge and experience, to given design situations.

OCR History A and B

In both of the A2 units for each specification, the tasks that candidates must complete require them to produce extended responses demonstrating the full breadth and depth of their historical knowledge and understanding. Candidates are rewarded for their ability to engage in analysis and evaluation of the nature of the subject as well as for providing evidence that they can think and work as historians.

The coursework for unit F965 requires candidates to assess critically different historical interpretations, to carry out an historical investigation of their own choice and to make connections between different aspects of topics and the factors influencing the views of historians.

The written papers for unit F966 require candidates to demonstrate their holistic knowledge, understanding and skills in responding to a number of issues relating to a specified theme within a period of between 105 and 150 years.

The controlled assessments for units F985 and F986 require candidates to address complex historical issues by working confidently with a number of historical interpretations which are presented as extensive source extracts.

The coursework for unit F987 requires candidates to engage in a sophisticated fashion with the concept of *significance* in the context of history and enables them to respond regarding an issue that is in line with their own area(s) of interest.

Awarding organisation meetings

As part of our 2010 scrutiny programme, we observed a large number of meetings held by awarding organisations in relation to the new GCE A level qualifications. Sixteen meetings related to standardising examiners, seven to standardising moderators and 14 to awarding grades.

Generally, the meetings observed were organised and managed effectively, and were conducted in line with the detailed requirements of the *GCSE, GCE, principal learning and project code of practice*. Although a small number of instances of non-compliance were evident, which are detailed below, the nature of these and/or the remedial actions taken by the awarding organisations meant that they did not adversely affect the outcomes for learners.

We require the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series and will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately.

Standardising examiners

The written papers for Edexcel Physics and Edexcel Spanish were marked online using the awarding organisation's established processes, as was component F524/01 for OCR Design and Technology. The written papers for AQA English Literature A and B, AQA Geography, and OCR History A were marked traditionally (ie not online), as were the externally assessed coursework route for Edexcel Physics, the speaking test for Edexcel Spanish, component F524/02 for OCR Design and Technology, and the controlled assessment for OCR History B. All of the marking was completed by examiners who were subject experts, except for the Edexcel Physics written papers, where some responses that would be relatively straightforward to consider were allocated to other types of marker.

For each specification, the examiners (and in the case of Edexcel Physics the markers) were standardised to ensure that they had a well-founded and common understanding of the requirements of the mark schemes or marking criteria that they could then apply reliably to candidates' work. This process took place at face-to-face meetings, with the examiners and/or markers for each specification trained using examples of candidates' work for which the marking had been agreed by senior examiners at previous meetings. The examiners and/or markers were required to mark a number of these examples to an agreed standard to qualify for live marking. Similar examples were then used to monitor their marking on an ongoing basis.

In most cases, these meetings followed the process required by the code of practice. There were useful briefings and generally effective processes for discussing mark schemes and/or marking criteria, as well as for considering candidates' work.

However, some instances of non-compliance with the code of practice were also noted. These included examiners not completing the required preparatory work, examiners' work not being checked enough as part of the standardisation process and examiners not having developed a sufficiently clear and common understanding of how to apply the mark scheme by the end of the standardisation meeting.

Standardising moderators

The coursework units for AQA English Literature A and B, OCR Design and Technology, and OCR History A and B were marked by internal assessors in centres, with a sample of candidates' work then moderated by the awarding organisation in each case to ensure that it was in line with agreed standards. This approach was also adopted for Edexcel Physics for the internally assessed coursework route.

The moderators for each specification were standardised to ensure that they had a well-founded and common understanding of the requirements of the marking criteria that they could then apply reliably to candidates' work. This process took place at face-to-face meetings and was along similar lines to the process for standardising examiners and markers.⁴

In most cases, these meetings followed the process required by the code of practice. There were useful briefings and generally effective processes for discussing marking criteria as well as for considering candidates' work.

However, some instances of non-compliance with the code of practice were also noted. These included consideration of only a relatively limited range of candidates' work and moderators' work not being checked enough as part of the standardisation process.

Awarding grades

When candidates' work had been marked or moderated, an awarding committee met for each specification to recommend grade boundaries for each unit and to consider the resultant grade outcomes for the specification as a whole. These awarding committees comprised the chair of examiners, the chief examiner and the principal examiner or principal moderator for each unit.

Each awarding committee reviewed a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence, such as examples of candidates' work and statistical information. The members then used their collective professional judgement to recommend marks for the key grade boundaries for each unit – for A level qualifications, these are the A/B and E/U grade

⁴ In each case, there were also arrangements in place for providing instructions and guidance to centres and internal assessors, as well as for authenticating and/or supervising candidates' work.

boundaries. The remaining grade boundaries for each unit were calculated mathematically from the judgemental recommendations that had been made.

In most cases, these meetings followed the process required by the code of practice. There was appropriate consideration of a suitable range of qualitative and quantitative evidence in recommending key grade boundary marks. Furthermore, each awarding organisation had carried out a range of statistical modelling before the meetings with a view to ensuring that standards from previous specifications were maintained in the new specifications in line with the agreements with the regulators.

However, some instances of non-compliance with the code of practice were also noted. These included limited availability of candidates' work and limited consideration of the comparability of optional routes.

Setting and maintaining grading standards

The introduction of new specifications and the associated changes to assessment structures presents challenges in ensuring that awarding organisations set and maintain appropriate grading standards over time.

Accordingly, Ofqual and the regulators for Wales and Northern Ireland worked with the awarding organisations to set appropriate standards in the new GCE A level qualifications that were awarded for the first time in 2010. This process was a continuation of the one begun in 2009 to ensure that appropriate standards had been set in the new GCE AS qualifications.

In monitoring the new qualifications, the regulators aimed to ensure that standards (in the sense of qualification-level outcomes) were comparable with those from the previous specifications so that, all things being equal, candidates with the same knowledge, understanding and skills would achieve the same grade, regardless of which specification they had entered. Equally, we aimed to ensure that the new qualification-level GCE A* grade was (as with any other GCE grade) awarded fairly and consistently across awarding organisations in each subject.

In addition to our detailed monitoring of individual qualifications as part of the scrutiny programme, we agreed with the awarding organisations a comprehensive monitoring process for setting and maintaining grading standards. This meant we could be confident that candidates taking any of the new specifications were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to those taking the previous specifications.

A key aspect of this monitoring process was agreeing mechanisms with the awarding organisations by which they would provide to the regulators, and exchange between themselves, data relating to any differences in grading outcomes from those they had expected.

We reviewed the outcomes for the new A2 units and the first A level results, including those for the new A* grade, before they were published. We were satisfied that appropriate and consistent standards had been applied and that candidates could have confidence that results in 2010 were in line with results from 2009.

We will continue to work with the regulators for Wales and Northern Ireland, and the awarding organisations, to ensure that appropriate standards are maintained in the new GCE A level qualifications in subsequent examination series.

Appendix A: Schemes of assessment

The A2 schemes of assessment for each of the A level specifications considered as part of the 2010 scrutiny programme are summarised below.

AQA GCE A level English Literature A (2741)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|------|-------|--------------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------|
| 3 | LITA3 | Reading for Meaning | Written paper | 2 hours 30 minutes | 80 | 60 |
| 4 | LITA4 | Extended Essay and Shakespeare Study | Coursework | N/A | 70 | 40 |

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is available in the winter and summer examination series. Unit LITA3 is externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit LITA4 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

For unit LITA3, the written paper is closed book. Candidates must respond to two questions (each worth 40 marks):

- question 1 requires them to address two previously unseen extracts in the form of either prose, poetry or drama
- question 2 requires them to address two previously unseen extracts in the two forms not addressed by question 1.

Each question requires candidates to use their wider reading of at least three texts within the unit theme of *Love Through the Ages*. This wider reading must include prose, poetry and drama, literature written by both men and women, literature written over time (from Chaucer to the present day) and some non-fiction texts.

For unit LITA4, candidates are required to produce one extended comparative essay (approximately 3,000 words). This must address three texts, one of which will be any Shakespeare play, with the other two texts being taken from any of prose, poetry and drama. The texts may be either linked by the unit theme of *Love Through the Ages* or by a theme of the candidate's own choice.

AQA GCE A level English Literature B (2746)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration (hours) | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|------|-------|---------------------------------|-----------------|------------------|-------|---------------------|
| 3 | LITB3 | Texts and genres | Written paper | 2 | 80 | 60 |
| 4 | LITB4 | Further and Independent Reading | Coursework | N/A | 60 | 40 |

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is available in the winter and summer examination series. Unit LITB3 is externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit LITB4 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

For unit LITB3, the written paper is closed book. Candidates must respond to two questions (each worth 40 marks):

- the section A question requires them to address one set text from either of the genres *Elements of the Gothic* and *Elements of the Pastoral*
- the section B question requires them to address at least three set texts from either of the two genres indicated above, including at least one text from the period 1300–1800.

In section A, there is one question for each set text; in section B, there is a choice of three questions on each of the two genres indicated above.

For unit LITB4, candidates are required to produce two pieces of coursework (each worth 30 marks):

- a comparative study of an aspect of two texts chosen by the candidate (1,500–2,000 words)
- an application of an aspect of a pre-released critical anthology to a literary text or texts chosen by the candidate (1,200–1,500 words).

AQA GCE A level Geography (2031)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|------|-------|-----------------------------------|-----------------|--------------------|-------|---------------------|
| 3 | GEOG3 | Contemporary Geographical Issues | Written paper | 2 hours 30 minutes | 90 | 60 |
| 4 | GEO4A | Geography Fieldwork Investigation | Written paper | 1 hour 30 minutes | 60 | 40 |
| | GEO4B | Geographical Issue Evaluation | Written paper | 1 hour 30 minutes | 60 | 40 |

Candidates must complete unit GEOG3 and either unit GEO4A or unit GEO4B. Each unit is normally available in the winter and summer examination series. However, for this first year of assessment, unit GEOG3 was not available in the winter examination series. Each unit is externally marked by the awarding organisation.

For unit GEOG3, candidates must respond to three questions, one addressing physical geography, one addressing human geography and one addressing either physical or human geography (though this must not address a topic that the candidate has addressed in the first two questions). The topics for physical geography are *Plate Tectonics and Associated Hazards*, *Weather and Climate and Associated Hazards* and *Ecosystems: Change and Challenge*. The topics for human geography are *World Cities, Development and Globalisation* and *Contemporary Conflicts and Challenges*. The questions require candidates to produce short and extended responses, as well as an essay.

For unit GEO4A, candidates must respond to a series of questions regarding a fieldwork investigation that they have completed (section A) and to a series of questions assessing their fieldwork skills through a range of stimulus material (section B). The questions require candidates to produce short and extended responses.

For unit GEO4B, candidates must respond to a series of questions relating to a range of stimulus material provided in an advance information booklet. The questions require candidates to produce short and extended responses.

Edexcel GCE A level Physics (9PH01)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|-------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|------------------------|-------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| 4 | 6PH04 | Physics on the Move | Written paper | 1 hour 35 minutes | 80 | 40 |
| 5 | 6PH05 | Physics from Creation to Collapse | Written paper | 1 hour 35 minutes | 80 | 40 |
| 6 | 6PH06 | Experimental Physics | Coursework | N/A | 40 | 20 |

Candidates must complete each of the units. Units 6PH04 and 6PH05 are available in the winter and summer examination series; unit 6PH06 is only available in the summer examination series. Units 6PH04 and 6PH05 are externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit 6PH06 may be either externally marked by the awarding organisation or internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

Units 6PH04 and 6PH05 both have two sections:

- section A (10 marks) requires candidates to respond to multiple-choice questions
- section B (70 marks) requires candidates to produce short and extended responses to questions.

Unit 6PH04 addresses *Further Mechanics, Electric and Magnetic Fields* and *Particle Physics*; unit 6PH05 addresses *Thermal Energy, Nuclear Decay, Oscillations, Astrophysics* and *Cosmology*.

For unit 6PH06, candidates must plan an experiment, carry out a plan of an experiment and analyse the experimental results. The plan of the experiment carried out may be the candidate's own plan, a plan provided by the awarding organisation or a plan devised by the centre. Candidates must then produce a report about their experiment.

Edexcel GCE A level Spanish (9SP01)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|-------------|-------------|---|------------------------|--------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| 3 | 6SP03 | Understanding and Spoken Response in Spanish | Speaking test | 11–13 minutes | 50 | 35 |
| 4 | 6SP04 | Research, Understanding and Written Response in Spanish | Written paper | 2 hours 30 minutes | 100 | 65 |

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is only available in the summer examination series. Both units are externally marked by the awarding organisation.

Unit 6SP03 requires candidates to outline for approximately one minute an issue that they have selected, adopting a definite stance towards this. They are then required to defend and justify their opinions for up to four minutes.

Subsequently, the teacher/examiner initiates a spontaneous discussion in which a minimum of two further unpredictable areas of discussion will be covered. These issues may or may not relate to the issue selected by the candidate, but will not require specialised factual knowledge or relate to Spanish-language culture.

Unit 6SP04 has three sections:

- section A (10 marks) requires candidates to respond to a short written translation exercise, based on a stimulus text of approximately 80 words in length, which assesses their ability to transfer meaning from English into Spanish effectively
- section B (45 marks) requires candidates to produce a Spanish-language essay (240–270 words) in response to one of seven questions, each of which is linked to the general topic areas for the unit and invites either discursive or creative writing
- section C (45 marks) requires candidates to produce a research-based essay in Spanish (240–270 words) that:

- is linked to an area of interest to the candidate
- relates to the culture and/or society of a Spanish-language country, countries or community
- relates to one of the four research-based essay topic areas for the unit.

The general topic areas for the unit are *Youth Culture and Concerns, Lifestyle: Health and Fitness, The World Around Us: Travel, Tourism, Environmental Issues and the Spanish-speaking World, Education and Employment, Customs, Traditions, Beliefs and Religions, National and International Events: Past, Present and Future and Literature and the Arts.*

The research-based essay topic areas for the unit are *Geographical Area, Historical Study, Aspects of Modern Society and Literature and the Arts.*

OCR GCE A level Design and Technology: Product Design (H453)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|------|------|---------------------------|-----------------|-----------------------|-------|---------------------|
| 3 | F523 | Design, Make and Evaluate | Coursework | 40 hours | 120 | 60 |
| 4 | F524 | Product Design | Written paper | 2 hours 30 minutes | 90 | 40 |

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is normally available in the winter and summer examination series. However, for this first year of assessment, neither unit was available in the winter examination series. Unit F523 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation; unit F524 is externally marked by the awarding organisation.

For unit F523, candidates are required to design, make and evaluate a product, as well as producing a related marketing presentation, and a review and reflection. The project must address one of the materials focus areas.

Unit F524 comprises two components, F524/01 (36 marks) and F524/02 (54 marks). For each component, candidates are required to answer one question from a choice of eight, which represent the materials focus areas. Component F524/01 requires candidates to produce short and extended responses. Component F524/02 requires candidates to respond to a given design situation by producing a specification and then a range of developed ideas. Candidates may or may not choose to respond to the same materials focus area in each component.

The materials focus areas for both units are *Built Environment and Construction, Engineering, Food, Graphic Products, Manufacturing, Resistant materials, Textiles and Systems and Control*.

OCR GCE A level History A (H506)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration (hours) | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|-------------|-------------|---|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| 3 | F965 | Historical Interpretations and Investigations | Coursework | N/A | 80 | 40 |
| 4 | F966 | Historical Themes | Written paper | 2 | 120 | 60 |

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is available in the winter and summer examination series. Unit F965 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation; unit F966 is externally marked by the awarding organisation.

For unit F965, candidates are required to produce two extended essays (each worth 40 marks and of up to 2,000 words in length). One essay should be focused on historical interpretations and one on historical investigations.

Unit F966 comprises two options – *Medieval and Early Modern 1066–1715* and *Modern 1789–1997*. Candidates respond for one option only. Each option comprises six study topics, with three questions addressing each of these. Candidates are required to respond to two questions (each worth 60 marks), which may be taken from either one or two of the study topics.

OCR GCE A level History B (H508)

| Unit | Code | Title | Assessment type | Duration (hours) | Marks | Weighting (% of A2) |
|-------------|-------------|--|------------------------|-------------------------|--------------|----------------------------|
| 3 | F985 | Historical Controversies – British History | Controlled assessment | 3 | 60 | 60 |
| | F986 | Historical controversies – Non-British History | Controlled assessment | 3 | 60 | 60 |
| 4 | F987 | Historical Significance | Coursework | N/A | 40 | 40 |

Candidates must complete unit F987 and either unit F985 or unit F986. Each unit is available in the winter and summer examination series. Units F985 and F986 are externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit F987 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

Units F985 and F986 each comprise four study topics. Candidates are required to respond to two questions (each worth 30 marks) regarding their chosen study topic – one question requires the analysis of an extract or extracts from one historian; one question considers how a particular approach has contributed to understanding of the topic. The task must be completed under supervised conditions.

For unit F987, candidates are required to produce a personal study (of up to 3,000 words in length) and a research diary (of up to 1,000 words in length). Candidates select their study topic, though it must address the significance of historical events, sites or individuals.

Appendix B: GCE AS and A level qualification criteria

The revised GCE AS and A level qualification criteria (February 2007), which relate to the A level specifications considered as part of the 2010 scrutiny programme, are provided below.



Qualifications and
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru
Welsh Assembly Government



Rewarding Learning

GCE AS and A level qualification criteria

February 2007

QCA/06/2866

This is an extract (pages 28–30) from the ‘General Certificates of Education (GCEs)’ section of *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293). Changes to the previous criteria are indicated in bold.

Content of General Certificates of Education (GCEs)

85 The titles of GCEs must:

- a) correspond to the titles used in the relevant subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities, where such criteria exist
- b) be sufficiently broad to cover different specifications in the same subject area, if relevant subject criteria are not published by the regulatory authorities.

86 The subject matter of GCEs must:

- a) meet the GCE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for the subject title, where they exist
- b) compare in substance and range to the GCE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for other subjects, if relevant subject criteria do not exist
- c) for AS qualifications:
 - i) provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the first half of a full A level course of study
 - ii) enable candidates to be assessed normally, by means of **two** assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level
 - iii) include assessment units that will normally be weighted within the range of **15–35** per cent of the full A level. **Weightings outside this range may be agreed where appropriate with the regulatory authorities**
 - iv) for double-award specifications, enable candidates to be assessed normally by means of **four** assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level double award
- d) for A2 assessments that will be combined with AS assessments to lead to the award of a full A level:
 - i) provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the second half of a full A level course of study
 - ii) enable candidates to be assessed normally, by means of **two** assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level
 - iii) include assessment units that will normally be weighted within the range of **15–35** per cent of the full A level. **Weightings outside this range may be agreed where appropriate with the regulatory authorities**
 - iv) for double-award specifications, enable candidates to be assessed normally by means of four assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level double award
- e) include optional units **only** if these:
 - i) demand additional skills, knowledge and/or understanding
 - ii) extend the core content within a specialist context and/or introduce links to another subject area

f) identify opportunities to generate evidence for the assessment of the nationally specified wider key skills of improving own learning and performance, problem solving, and working with others.

Assessment in GCEs

87 The assessment arrangements in GCEs must:

a) offer candidates the opportunity to be assessed either (in stages) during the course or at the end of the course

b) include an explanation of the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment units

c) normally include only one component of assessment (internal assessment may involve more than task, while external assessment may, for example, involve listening, reading and writing aspects. In each case, there will be one awarding process per unit)

d) ensure that internal assessment is used only where it is the soundest method of assessing specific skills within the assessment objectives, and agree it with the regulatory authorities on a subject-by-subject basis

e) ensure that, where internal assessment is included, specifications make clear how reliability and fairness are to be secured, by setting out requirements that ensure the robustness of each stage of the internal assessment, ie:

- **setting of tasks**
- **extent of supervision in carrying out of tasks**
- **conditions under which assessment takes place**
- **marking of the assessment and internal standardising procedures**
- **any moderation process**

f) not exceed a maximum examining time for external assessments of three hours at AS and four hours at A2, unless otherwise agreed in the subject criteria

g) show the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective (or group of assessment objectives) and to each assessment unit

h) show which assessment objectives will include the assessment of written communication

i) include sufficient synoptic assessment at A2 to test the candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of the subject **and their holistic understanding of the subject**

j) include A2 assessments that provide appropriate demand through

- **the use of a variety of stems in questions**
- **ensuring connectivity between sections of questions**
- **requiring extended writing in all subjects, except where agreed with the regulatory authorities as inappropriate**
- **using a wide range of question type to address different skills**
- **including synoptic assessment**

- k) be comparable for all candidates, even where there are optional assessment units or optional examination questions
- l) where candidates are required to produce written material in English, Welsh and Irish (Gaeilge), require candidates to:
 - i) ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear
 - ii) select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and to complex subject matter
 - iii) organise information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate
- m) comply with subject criteria relating to the balance between external and internal assessment, including synoptic assessment where such criteria exist
- n) allow results of an assessment unit with the best result counting towards the qualification
- o) stipulate that results for a unit have a shelf-life limited only by the shelf-life of the relevant specification.

Reporting of GCEs

88 The qualification must specify arrangements for grading and reporting of GCEs so that:

- a) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at AS level is reported on a five-grade scale from A to E, where A is the highest
- b) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at A level is reported on a six-grade scale from A* to E, where A* is the highest
- c) attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at AS or A level is reported as unclassified or U
- c) the grades awarded match performance descriptions published by the regulatory authorities, if available
- d) if relevant performance descriptions published by the regulatory authorities are not available, the grades awarded match performance descriptions for AS and A2 levels at the grade boundaries A/B and E/U submitted by the awarding body and approved by the regulatory authorities.

89 AS double award is reported on the following grading scale: AA, AB, BB, BC, CC, CD, DD, DE, EE.

90 A level double award is reported on the following grading scale: A*A*, A*A, AA, AB, BB, BC, CC, CD, DD, DE, EE.

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| | |
|--|-------------------|
| Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation | |
| Spring Place | 2nd Floor |
| Coventry Business Park | Glendinning House |
| Herald Avenue | 6 Murray Street |
| Coventry CV5 6UB | Belfast BT1 6DN |

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346

www.ofqual.gov.uk