![QCA logo] Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Report on the performance of awarding bodies for general qualifications in 2006

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Executive summary

As the regulator of the public examination system in England, the Qualification and Curriculum Authority (QCA) is committed to securing a fair deal for learners. QCA regulates awarding bodies and qualifications to maintain public confidence in examination results. This is QCA's third annual report on the performance of the three awarding bodies based in England that offer A level and GCSE qualifications.

QCA has established performance expectations for the quality of service that awarding bodies provide and published a detailed code of practice that awarding bodies must follow. It monitors and reports on the performance of awarding bodies against these expectations and requirements every year. It will continue to monitor and report on awarding body performance, and will review, strengthen and introduce new expectations and requirements to ensure high levels of awarding body performance and customer service for learners and centres.

This report on the performance of the awarding bodies in 2006 shows the following.

All three awarding bodies provided a satisfactory level of service to centres. In 2006, the awarding bodies continued to demonstrate high levels of performance against QCA's performance expectations for the quality of service provided to centres. However, although the overall level of performance was high, none of the awarding bodies met QCA's performance expectation for producing question papers without errors. As a result, in 2007 QCA is looking in detail at the process for writing question papers to identify good practice in this area.

There were no significant concerns about marking and grading for A levels and GCSEs. However, the number of enquiries about results increased from 2005. Although the level of compliance with the requirements of the code of practice for these qualifications continues to be satisfactory, QCA will investigate and report on the processes for writing question papers and mark schemes to ensure confidence in the examination process. QCA will continue to monitor the performance of awarding bodies against all the requirements of the code of practice, and will also continue to monitor electronic marking at all three awarding bodies to ensure new developments do not have any adverse effects on candidates.

The number of candidates with access arrangements has increased significantly from 2005. QCA is committed to ensuring that all candidates have fair access to examinations, and centres and awarding bodies are required to ensure suitable access for all candidates. National Assessment Agency (NAA) field support officers have been working with exams officers in centres to increase awareness of centre-delegated arrangements, and QCA will

continue to monitor the provision of access arrangements for candidates to ensure that no centres are making inappropriate use of access arrangements. QCA is monitoring awarding bodies' procedures for approving arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements, and will report on this work in more detail in 2007.

There has been no increase in the number of candidates penalised for malpractice. The number of candidates penalised for malpractice in exams or coursework in 2006 was almost identical to 2005, and remains low, representing around 0.06 per cent of examination results. QCA has raised the profile of malpractice and worked with awarding bodies to ensure that candidates, parents and centres fully understand the penalties and consequences of malpractice.

The awarding bodies and regulators worked together to help safeguard the integrity of coursework. These activities strengthened awarding bodies' procedures for checking the authenticity of candidates' work and detecting suspected malpractice.

This report provides information on awarding body performance for general qualifications in 2006, together with details of QCA's actions as the regulator of these qualifications and actions for 2007. The appendix includes definitions and explanations of the terms, qualifications and performance expectations used in this report.

Introduction

This is QCA's third annual report on the performance of the three awarding bodies based in England that provided GCSEs and A levels in 2006 – AQA (Assessment and Qualifications Alliance), Edexcel and OCR (Oxford, Cambridge and RSA Examinations).

As the regulator of the public examination system in England, QCA is committed to securing a fair deal for learners. This means making sure that awarding bodies provide a high-quality service so that learners can be confident that examination results are accurate and reliable. QCA regulated these awarding bodies throughout 2006 in a number of ways, including specific activities in response to particular concerns that arose during the year. The findings resulting from these regulatory activities are published in this report.

QCA has established performance expectations that awarding bodies must meet and has published a code of practice that they must follow. These ensure that learners and centres receive the highest levels of customer service and that examination standards are consistent over time. QCA monitors and reports on the performance of awarding bodies for each of the performance expectations and against the requirements of the code of practice. If an awarding body fails to meet these requirements, QCA takes firm action to raise the performance of the awarding body. QCA regularly reviews the performance expectations and the code of practice to continue to improve awarding body performance.

This report contains information on actions that QCA has taken during 2006 and information on progress made on the actions identified in the 2005 report on awarding body performance. The final section of this report identifies actions for QCA in 2007, the outcome of which will be reported on next year.

This report is published on behalf of the qualifications regulators in England, Northern Ireland and Wales. QCA and the regulators for Northern Ireland and Wales produce a separate report on the extent of changes to examination results as a result of enquiries and appeals.

Quality of service provided to centres by awarding bodies

QCA has established performance expectations for the quality of service that awarding bodies should provide to centres. These performance expectations allow QCA to monitor and report on awarding body performance each year.

All three awarding bodies performed at a very high level against QCA's performance expectations for the June A level and GCSE examination series in 2006:

	QCA expectation	Performance in 2006		
		AQA	Edexcel	OCR
% of question papers dispatched to centres on time	100	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
% of question papers without errors	100	99.1 (99.0)	98.7 (99.1*)	98.6 (99.2)
% of examination results issued to centres on time	100	100 (100)	100 (100)	99.9 (100)
% of priority enquiries about examination results completed within 20 days	100	100 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
% of examination papers copied and sent out at least 10 days before the deadline for enquiries about results	100	100 (100)	100 (99.8)	99.7 (100)

Equivalent figures for June 2005 are provided in brackets. Percentages shown to nearest 0.1%. * The 2005 figure for Edexcel has been revised from 98.0% to 99.1% to enable like-for-like comparisons between awarding bodies and years.

Question papers

QCA has established two performance indicators on the production of question papers:

- dispatching question papers on time

- issuing question papers that do not need correction.

Providing question papers on time

QCA expects awarding bodies to despatch question papers and other assessment materials in time for centres to receive them at least one week before the timetabled examination date. As in 2005, all three awarding bodies met this requirement this year. This involved distributing more than 15.6 million question papers for the June examinations series in 2006 (around 6.6 million A level papers and 9.0 million GCSE papers).

As a result of previous security breaches, QCA expects awarding bodies to have contingency plans in place that allow them to react swiftly if any question papers are stolen and to maintain the integrity of the examination process. The awarding bodies issued replacement papers for two exams for the June examination series. In addition, awarding bodies issued revised question papers for a small number of centres and supervised the administration of these exams in centres.

Providing question papers without errors

QCA expects awarding bodies' question papers and assessment materials to contain no errors that could affect the candidates' responses. For this performance indicator, question papers requiring correction are those with significant typographical error or those with missing or invalid information that affects the content of the paper or might have a negative effect on candidates' responses.

For the June 2006 examination series, the three awarding bodies in total produced more than 3,000 different question papers for general qualifications, slightly fewer than in 2005. All three awarding bodies had a similar level of performance against this performance expectation. Overall performance is unchanged from last year, with 36 question papers (1.2% of the total) containing errors requiring correction, the same percentage as in 2005.

If a question paper does contain an error that requires correction, awarding bodies are expected to send an erratum notice to centres before the examination to make sure candidates are aware of the error. QCA also expects awarding bodies to take any errors in the question paper into account when marking candidates' work and awarding examination grades.

In June 2006, there were two instances where essential materials were missing from question papers that centres were informed about on the date of the examination. Information on the response of awarding bodies and QCA to these incidents is provided in the 'Results of QCA investigations' section of this report.

Examination results

QCA has established performance indicators associated with examination results:

- providing examination results on time

- responding to enquiries about examination results.

Providing examination results on time

QCA expects awarding bodies to produce examination results on time for all candidates with valid qualification entries. In 2006, this involved more than 7.3 million A level and GCSE examination results. AQA and Edexcel both provided all results on the agreed publication date for the June 2006 examination series, but OCR did not provide results on time for approximately 100 candidates for A level biology, A level history and A level critical thinking. Each awarding body is required to inform QCA before the agreed publication date if it is unable to issue results on time. OCR did not notify QCA that these candidates would not receive their A level results on results day.

QCA required OCR to review its quality assurance systems and methods of reporting to QCA to avoid similar situations in the future.

Responding to enquiries about examination results

The awarding bodies provide a priority service for centres to enquire about examination results that could affect candidates' places in higher or further education. QCA requires awarding bodies to deal with enquiries of this type within 20 days. As in 2005, all three awarding bodies met this performance expectation in 2006.

If asked, awarding bodies will provide copies of A level examination papers to help centres decide whether to enquire into particular examination results. QCA's requirement is for these papers to be copied and sent out more than 10 days before the deadline for enquiring about results. In 2006, over 32,000 requests for copies of A level exam papers were made, very similar to the number of requests in 2005 (around 1.7% of the total number of A level results in both 2005 and 2006). AQA and Edexcel met QCA's performance expectation, but there was a slight delay in sending out copies of 29 OCR examination papers.

In addition to priority enquiries about examination results, QCA expects all post-results marking enquiries to be completed within 35 days. As in 2005, QCA and the regulators for Northern Ireland and Wales are producing a separate report on the extent of changes to examination results as a result of enquiries and appeals.

Responding to enquiries from centres

In addition to the performance expectations on question papers and examination results, QCA expects all awarding bodies to provide a high level of customer service to centres and candidates throughout the year. The awarding bodies received more than 1.2 million queries from centres between September 2005 and August 2006, either by telephone, letter or email. QCA has not established a performance expectation for this area, but awarding bodies dealt with more than 95 per cent of these enquiries within 10 days.

Results of QCA investigations

During 2006, QCA investigated and responded to a range of issues connected with the performance of awarding bodies and the examination system as a whole. This included action by QCA and the awarding bodies to strengthen coursework arrangements, raise the profile of malpractice and ensure candidates were not disadvantaged by exam administration problems.

Review of coursework arrangements

QCA published *A review of GCE and GCSE coursework arrangements* in November 2005. The review considered the role of coursework in current specifications and the effectiveness of coursework in teaching, learning and assessment, and investigated issues relating to the authentication of coursework, marking and moderation, and arrangements in place to minimise the potential for malpractice.

As a result of this work, QCA established a coursework task force and published *Authenticating coursework: a teacher's guide* with practical suggestions for teachers on how to be sure that work submitted is the candidate's own. QCA also published *Coursework: a guide for parents* in March 2006 for parents of young people who are doing coursework. It outlines what coursework is, the rules for coursework, what support parents can legitimately provide, and highlights the consequences of malpractice. Both leaflets have been distributed widely and have been well received by teachers and the public.

QCA and the regulators for Northern Ireland and Wales also formed a project steering group to manage the implementation of a range of actions to help safeguard the integrity of coursework. The regulators required awarding bodies to take a common approach to the handling of coursework in 2006 and report on measures taken to check on the authenticity of candidates' work, detect suspected malpractice and give details of the penalties applied.

In advance of the June 2006 examinations, the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) issued a notice to centres and candidates about coursework authentication requirements. QCA required awarding bodies to contact centres where authentication statements were missing from coursework folders.

Awarding bodies conducted a survey of centres asking them to report any problems they had experienced in authenticating candidates' work. The vast majority of centres that responded said there had been no difficulty. In a small number of cases, centres had been unable to

satisfy themselves that the coursework produced was the candidate's own, which resulted in the candidate receiving no marks.

Awarding bodies also issued revised guidance materials to their coursework moderators regarding the investigation of missing authentication statements and the detection of plagiarism, including the use of plagiarism detection software.

In addition, the JCQ updated and strengthened its document *Suspected malpractice in examinations and assessments: policies and procedures* in May 2006. The JCQ also published *Instructions for conducting coursework/portfolios* in September 2006 to standardise guidance for centres on procedures for internal standardisation and to clarify the parameters of teachers' involvement in coursework.

The findings of the coursework review are also being taken into account in the development work on A level and GCSE qualifications.

Distribution of question papers to centres

As already mentioned in this report, awarding bodies informed centres about errors in 36 A level and GCSE question papers for the June 2006 examination series before the day of the exam. However, there were two instances, detailed below, in which centres were informed on the day of the examination that question papers did not include essential materials. In both cases, QCA required the awarding bodies to provide information about the actions they took to ensure that candidates were not unfairly affected.

AQA GCSE humanities

On the day of the examination, QCA was alerted that a source booklet required to answer some questions for Paper 1 of AQA GCSE humanities was not included in the packs of question papers sent to centres. These questions accounted for 24 of the 74 marks allocated to the paper. Without the source booklet, candidates would have difficulty with the questions. The matter was further complicated when a minority of centres (approximately 1,000 candidates) photocopied the pre-release source booklet issued in February and distributed it to candidates, whereas the remaining centres (approximately 10,000 candidates) did not.

AQA contacted centres immediately the error was apparent and alerted QCA to the situation promptly. To ensure candidates were not unfairly affected, QCA agreed a plan of remedial action with AQA. AQA held separate standardisation meetings for examiners marking scripts completed by candidates with the booklet and by those without the booklet, and made

changes to the mark scheme to reflect this. Separate awarding meetings making suitable allowance for any variation in the effective difficulty of the paper were held for each group of candidates and were observed by QCA. Centres affected by this error were informed of the steps taken. QCA is satisfied that these steps ensured that the standards for AQA GCSE humanities in 2006 are comparable with previous years' and with other GCSE examinations.

The error occurred because this was the first year that the paper and booklet had not been published internally by AQA and instructions to the external printer were misinterpreted. AQA has provided QCA with information on how it will ensure such an administrative error does not occur again.

OCR GCE geography A

OCR informed QCA on the day of the examination that an ordnance survey map was missing from question paper packs for Unit 2681 for OCR GCE geography A. Sixteen marks out of 75 were allocated to questions based on the map. OCR contacted centres immediately and instructed them to tell candidates to ignore the questions for which reference to the map was necessary. It was agreed with QCA that the paper would then be marked as normal out of 59 marks.

To ensure that no candidates were disadvantaged as a result of the missing map, OCR paid special attention to a number of factors when awarding this unit. These included candidates' forecast grades and their performance in other units, data on how this type of question had performed previously and historical data from centres. Correspondence from the small number of centres who had not received the information that candidates should not attempt questions referring to the map was also taken into account. QCA observed the awarding of grades for this unit and was able to confirm that OCR had done everything possible to ensure that candidates were not disadvantaged as a result of this error.

Compliance with QCA's code of practice for general qualifications

In addition to QCA's performance expectations for the quality of service provided to centres, QCA monitors and reports on the performance of awarding bodies against the requirements of the regulators' *GCSE, GCE, VCE, GNVQ and AEA code of practice 2006/7 (2006)* (QCA/06/1677).

The code of practice

The code of practice covers aspects of the examination system that cannot be monitored or reported against numerical targets. It contributes to ensuring quality, consistency and fairness in assessment and awarding for GCSE and A level qualifications. Each section of the code of practice sets out detailed requirements that awarding bodies must follow at different stages of the examining process. This includes detailed requirements on the processes for:

- writing question papers and mark schemes (section 3)

- marking examination papers and coursework (sections 4 and 5)

- grading candidates (section 6).

The code also includes detailed requirements for electronic marking, arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements and dealing with malpractice. QCA revises and updates the code of practice every year in response to changes in the examination system and will continue to monitor the performance of awarding bodies against the code of practice.

Code of practice monitoring activities

QCA carries out a programme of activities each year designed to assess the performance of awarding bodies against the requirements of each section of the code of practice. Where awarding bodies have not fully complied with the code of practice, QCA identifies and monitors any issues that require action in current and future examination series.

In addition to QCA's monitoring programme, awarding bodies are required to evaluate and report on the quality of their own systems and arrangements for GCSE and A level qualifications. As part of this self-assessment process, each awarding body must develop an action plan to promote continuing improvement and to address any weaknesses identified.

QCA will continue to review findings from self-assessment reports alongside other monitoring programme findings to inform the monitoring programme in future years.

This report provides information on findings from a number of QCA monitoring programme activities in 2006, including:

- the scrutiny programme

- electronic marking

- awarding and grading candidates' work

- access arrangements and special consideration

- malpractice by candidates and centres.

Scrutiny programme

QCA's scrutiny programme is a series of in-depth studies of the examining process across a range of specifications each year. It is designed to evaluate the performance of awarding bodies against the requirements of the code of practice, particularly those covered by sections 3, 4, 5 and 6. Each scrutiny involves a team of consultants with subject expertise observing and monitoring awarding body meetings, analysing question papers and mark schemes and reviewing candidates' work. QCA is responsible for recruiting, organising and managing the work of these scrutiny teams, coordinating communications with the awarding bodies and for drawing together the findings of each scrutiny. A report on each scrutiny specification is produced for the awarding body, which identifies areas of non-compliance and recommendations requiring action. If an awarding body complies with all the requirements of the code for a particular stage of the examining process, the scrutiny report will not include any recommendations on that section of the code of practice.

In 2006, QCA completed scrutinies on 15 GCSE and A level specifications, five for each awarding body. These specifications were selected on the basis of an analysis of risk, which considered factors such as: the number of candidates, the length of time since the previous scrutiny and the number and nature of complaints from centres. In 2006, this involved specifications in the following subject areas: German, ICT, manufacturing, media studies and statistics at GCSE; and biology, chemistry, critical thinking, design and technology, drama and theatre studies, general studies, geography and mathematics at A level:

	Total	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of scrutinies	15	5	5	5
▪ GCSE	6	3	1	2
▪ A level	9	2	4	3

QCA observed more than 120 awarding body meetings and activities associated with the scrutiny specifications in 2006, including over 70 examiner or moderator standardisation meetings. QCA also observed 23 other meetings, including visits to centres by examiners or moderators, question paper evaluation committee meetings and training meetings for examiners, moderators and teachers.

2006 scrutiny programme recommendations

For the scrutiny programme in 2006, the number of specifications with recommendations requiring action for each stage of the examining process was:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of scrutiny specifications in 2006	5	5	5
Scrutiny specifications with recommendations on			
▪ writing question papers and mark schemes	5	5	5
▪ marking examination papers and coursework	4	5	2
▪ awarding and grading candidates	2	3	0

In 2006, there was generally a high rate of compliance with the detailed requirements of the code of practice. However, in most cases there was at least one recommendation requiring action for each awarding body on each stage of the examining process. Question papers and mark schemes were usually found to be of consistently high quality, but there was at least one aspect of the question papers and mark schemes for the units and components in every specification where some improvement in quality was necessary. QCA plans to undertake work during 2007 that will look in detail at question paper and mark scheme writing processes to identify good practice in this area.

Awarding bodies' response to scrutiny programme recommendations

At the end of the scrutiny programme, each awarding body must produce an action plan outlining how it will address the scrutiny report recommendations. In 2006, the response of each awarding body to recommendations requiring action from previous years' scrutiny reports was monitored in two ways.

- By considering question papers and mark schemes from the June 2006 examination series. Checks included issues such as whether the weight given to particular assessment objectives reflected those detailed in the specification; that all language used in question papers was clear, precise and intelligible to candidates; and that, where appropriate, mark schemes were clear about how the quality of written communication should be rewarded.

- By observing awarding body meetings as part of QCA's code of practice monitoring programme. Depending on the type of meeting being observed, this included checking that the drafting of questions papers and mark schemes took place at the same time; that all new examiners received appropriate training before starting marking; and that awarding bodies retained an archive of marked candidate work at key grade boundaries to inform future grade boundary setting.

Each recommendation has a deadline for action, which depends on the nature of the recommendation. All three awarding bodies implemented action plans to address recommendations in 2006. In 2007, QCA will continue to monitor the performance of awarding bodies in response to relevant scrutiny report recommendations.

Electronic marking

In 2006, awarding bodies continued to expand their use of electronic marking of examination papers with OCR making use of electronic marking for the first time. Nearly 5 million examination papers for the June 2006 examination were marked electronically (3 million by Edexcel, 1.6 million by AQA and 0.3 million by OCR). This was around one-third of the total number of papers taken in 2006, and a steady increase on the 1 million examination papers marked electronically in 2004 and the 3 million marked electronically in 2005.

QCA monitored electronic marking to ensure that marking and awarding processes were conducted in accordance with the code of practice requirements. There were no problems associated with the use of electronic marking in 2006. In 2005, the introduction of electronic marking did create some marking delays at Edexcel, though these did not result in candidates receiving late results. QCA required Edexcel to take action to prevent a recurrence of these problems. Monitoring in 2006 has satisfied QCA that Edexcel has taken appropriate action

and that there are no areas of concern associated with Edexcel's electronic marking.

The increase in the proportion of examination papers marked electronically is likely to continue in 2007 and QCA will continue to monitor electronic marking at all three awarding bodies.

All three awarding bodies have also conducted trials in using new technology either to standardise examiners or to conduct grade awarding meetings during 2006. In both instances, the ability to conduct successful standardisation and awarding meetings online, rather than requiring all participants to meet face-to-face at the same time, has positive implications for addressing the logistical problems often associated with convening these meetings at present. These include the availability of examiners, time constraints and the sharing of relevant materials on paper. QCA has encouraged and will continue to encourage these innovations as positive developments while at the same time monitoring the awarding bodies' work in these areas to ensure that it does not have any adverse effects on candidates.

Awarding and grading candidates' work

For each specification, a committee of experienced examiners meets to consider candidates' work before establishing grade boundary marks to maintain standards over time. In 2006, QCA staff and consultants observed more than 80 awarding meetings against the requirements of section 6 of the code of practice. The selection of meetings observed was based on a number of factors. These included specifications that were being awarded for the first time; that had papers marked electronically; that had been identified through risk analysis or from previous monitoring; and that formed part of the 2006 scrutiny programme. Representatives of teacher associations also observed a small number of awarding meetings. These meetings covered a range of GCSE and A level specifications for both the January and June 2006 examination series.

As in 2005, QCA did not identify any significant instances of non-compliance from the observation of awarding meetings this year. Overall, all awarding bodies established grade boundaries using professional judgement based on the quality of candidates' work and informed by relevant technical and statistical information.

New A level specifications in 10 subject areas with a vocational emphasis were taken by candidates and awarded for the first time in 2006. Proposals designed to ensure the appropriate setting of standards in this first year had been agreed between QCA and the awarding bodies:

- grade boundary decisions based on consideration of the quality of candidate work were informed by statistical and archive materials from closely related subjects
- senior examiners attended meetings at other awarding bodies to help establish common standards.

As already noted in this report, there were incidents involving administrative errors with question papers that impacted on candidates' performance and needed to be addressed at the relevant awarding meetings. QCA is satisfied that appropriate action was taken by the awarding bodies to ensure public confidence in the fairness and accuracy of the final results. As in 2005, QCA also carried out post-award audits to check awarding bodies' procedures for confirming the grade boundary marks recommended at awarding meetings. A small number of changes to grade boundary marks were made at the post-award stage, all with the support of the relevant chair of examiners.

In previous years QCA has identified that there has sometimes been a lack of suitable samples of candidates' work at some awarding meetings for portfolio units for GCSEs in vocational subjects. This was sometimes due to the small number of candidates entered for the specifications, but in a few cases the problem related to obtaining appropriate samples of candidates' work from centres. The findings from the observation of awarding meetings in 2006 show that awarding bodies have made efforts to address this, resulting in an increase in the amount of candidate work available for consideration at awarding meetings.

Access arrangements and special consideration

Section 7 of the code of practice requires awarding bodies to ensure candidates with particular requirements can demonstrate their skills, knowledge and understanding, for example by providing modified question papers for candidates with visual impairments. However, the code makes clear that arrangements must be based on the needs of individual candidates and must not give candidates an unfair advantage or undermine the integrity of the qualifications in any way. In addition, the code sets out requirements for awarding bodies for special consideration for candidates affected by an unforeseen and temporary illness, injury or incident at the time of the examination.

In 2006, awarding bodies dealt with more than 440,000 requests for arrangements for candidates with particular requirements, including requests for modified question papers and requests for special consideration. QCA is committed to ensuring that all candidates have fair access to examinations, and information on requests for arrangements is collected and reported to monitor change over time.

Awarding body-approved arrangements

Arrangements are available to ensure access to assessment for candidates with a range of different requirements. Between September 2005 and August 2006, awarding bodies approved just over 125,000 requests for arrangements for A level and GCSE candidates:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Awarding body-approved arrangements	51,286 (42,306)	31,395 (25,526)	42,433 (37,075)

Equivalent figures for 2005 are provided in brackets*.* These figures are for the number of awarding body-approved arrangements for A level and GCSE examinations rather than the number of candidates, as an individual candidate may require a number of arrangements and may take examinations from more than one awarding body.

The total number of awarding body-approved arrangements for 2006 has risen by just over 20,000, an increase of one-fifth compared with the equivalent period for 2005 (from 104,907 in 2005 to 125,114 in 2006). This increase in the number of arrangements is much larger than the increase (of around 1 per cent) in the number of A level and GCSE examinations in the same period:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of requests approved for:	51,286 (42,306)	31,395 (25,526)	42,433 (37,075)
▪ reader	27,478 (22,606)	16,270 (13,673)	23,642 (19,361)
▪ scribe (including voice-activated computer)	13,904 (11,218)	9,471 (7,305)	11,446 (9,801)
▪ computer/word processor	7,066 (5,821)	4,358 (3,044)	5,572 (5,357)
▪ extra time (more than 25 per cent more time)	1,220 (1,312)	518 (533)	655 (1,538)
▪ alternative venue	1,046 (709)	390 (578)	512 (295)
▪ use of signer	194 (331)	198 (178)	221 (433)
▪ practical assistant	378 (309)	190 (215)	385 (290)

Equivalent figures for 2005 are provided in brackets. These figures are for the number of awarding body-approved arrangements rather than the number of candidates, as an individual candidate may require a number of arrangements and may take examinations from more than one awarding body.

The most frequent arrangement, accounting for just over half of all approved requests, is for readers, for which the number of requests increased by around one-fifth from 2005. There were similar increases in a number of other arrangements, though the number of requests for candidates to have more than 25 per cent extra time and signers both decreased between 2005 and 2006. QCA has started to monitor awarding bodies' procedures for the approval of arrangements for candidates with particular assessment requirements in 2006, and will report on this work in more detail in 2007.

Centre-delegated arrangements

In addition to requests for arrangements that are approved by awarding bodies, responsibility for some arrangements is delegated to centres. Centre-delegated arrangements are available for a range of assessment requirements for eligible candidates, and are designed for candidates with more commonly occurring needs requiring lower levels of assistance. Centres do not have to request approval for these arrangements from an awarding body, but they are expected to inform awarding bodies of these arrangements in advance of the examination. NAA has created an online system to allow centres to record centre-delegated arrangements.

As for awarding body-approved arrangements, QCA monitors and reports on the number of centre-delegated arrangements each year. However, direct comparison between the number of centre-delegated and awarding body-approved arrangements is not possible as a centre-delegated arrangement for one candidate can cover a large number of qualifications from different awarding bodies, whereas separate requests for awarding body-approved arrangements for every candidate have to be made to each awarding body.

Between September 2005 and August 2006, centres recorded almost 79,000 candidates with centre-delegated arrangements, a rise of almost 35,000, or four-fifths, of the number in 2005. However, as figures for centre-delegated arrangements are only available if centres make use of NAA's online system for recording centre-delegated arrangements, it is not possible to make any year-on-year comparisons about centre-delegated arrangements until all centres are using this system.

Candidates with centre-delegated arrangements:	78,833 (43,869)
▪ extra time (up to 25 per cent more time)	56,900 (35,319)
▪ bilingual dictionary with extra time	6,286 (4,083)
▪ bilingual dictionary without extra time	9,382 (1,680)
▪ supervised rest breaks	3,539 (1,919)
▪ transcript	1,416 (485)
▪ prompter	1,310 (383)

Equivalent figures for 2005 are provided in brackets. These figures are for the total number of candidates with centre-delegated arrangements, rather than the number of arrangements for candidates for each awarding body.

Almost three-quarters of centre-delegated arrangements are for up to 25 per cent more time, and the number of arrangements in this category increased by around three-fifths from 2005. There were large increases in the number of candidates registered with access to bilingual dictionaries and in candidates registered for transcripts and prompters (a three-fold increase from 2005 to 2006 in both cases).

QCA is committed to ensuring that all candidates have fair access to examinations. NAA field support officers have been working with exams officers in centres to increase awareness of centre-delegated arrangements and the JCQ has provided clearer information about centre-delegated arrangements in its materials for centres. There is a requirement for centres to ensure suitable access for all centres, and more than four-fifths of centres are now using NAA's online system to record details of their centre-delegated arrangements.

QCA will continue to monitor and report on the extent of centre-delegated arrangements in 2007 to ensure that candidates, parents or centres are not making inappropriate arrangements to gain an unfair advantage. The JCQ will also be carrying out inspections at centres in 2007 to ensure that no centres are making inappropriate use of centre-delegated arrangements.

Modified question papers

In addition to awarding body-approved and centre-delegated arrangements, the awarding bodies provided just over 20,000 modified question papers for the June 2006 examination series. Modified question papers allow candidates with a range of visual and hearing impairments to demonstrate their abilities:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of modified question papers:	8,970 (13,351)	5,806 (2,562*)	5,763 (4,433)
▪ modified paper (visually impaired)	5,601 (8,092)	3,293	3,225 (2,549)
▪ enlarged paper (visually impaired)	2,183 (3,040)	1,107	1,245 (760)
▪ braille	703 (1,181)	338	402 (415)
▪ modified paper (hearing impaired)	483 (1,038)	1,068	891 (709)

Equivalent figures for 2005 are provided in brackets. *The Edexcel figure for 2005 is the number of candidates requiring modified question papers, rather than the total number of modified question papers provided.

The number of modified papers produced for the June 2006 examination series is very similar to 2005, remaining at around 0.1 per cent of the total number of examination papers produced in 2006.

Special consideration

All awarding bodies have procedures for centres to request special consideration for candidates. This covers candidates who were absent from an examination or disadvantaged as a result of a temporary illness, injury, indisposition or other unforeseen incidents immediately before or during the examination period, and candidates for whom awarding body-approved and centre-delegated arrangements had been approved but not implemented. For the June 2006 examination series, awarding bodies approved more than 270,000 requests for special consideration:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of requests for special consideration	134,857 (130,971)	93,225 (65,797)	68,584 (70,031)
Number of requests approved	132,051 (127,653)	83,340 (60,075)	59,576 (67,472)
% of requests approved	97.9 (97.5)	89.4 (91.3)	86.9 (96.3)

Equivalent figures for 2005 are provided in brackets. These figures are for the number of requests for special consideration rather than the number of candidates, as an individual candidate may require special consideration for a number of examination papers and may take examinations from more than one awarding body.

The total number of requests for special consideration in 2006 was greater than for the equivalent period in 2005 (266,799 in 2005 compared with 296,666 in 2006), an increase of around one-tenth. The number of approved requests represents around 1.8 per cent of the total number of examination papers completed for the June 2006 examination series, or less than one approved request for every 50 examination papers. The proportion of requests approved by Edexcel and OCR was lower than in 2005, and AQA continues to approve the highest proportion of requests.

Special consideration only allows for relatively minor adjustment to a candidate's mark, of up to 5 per cent of the maximum mark for the question paper, and is designed to be fair to candidates without compromising standards. The maximum adjustment is reserved for exceptional cases, for example candidates disadvantaged by a recent death of an immediate family member. Most adjustments for special consideration are smaller, for example 2 per cent of the maximum available mark for candidates with minor illness on the day of the examination.

Malpractice by candidates and centres

Section 8 of the code of practice covers requirements for awarding bodies' procedures for dealing with alleged and suspected malpractice. This includes any breaches of regulations that might undermine the integrity of an examination, from deliberate attempts by candidates to communicate with each other during an examination to inadvertent failures by centre staff to comply with awarding body instructions. Centres must report all incidents of malpractice, and the code of practice requires awarding bodies to investigate any cases of suspected malpractice.

Candidate malpractice

The penalties for candidate malpractice vary depending on the type of offence and range from warnings and loss of marks, through to disqualification from units, components or qualifications. For example, candidates who bring a mobile phone into an examination room, but do not have the phone in their possession, might receive a warning, whereas a candidate found using a mobile phone during an examination might be disqualified from the unit or the qualification in the current examination series.

In the June 2006 examination series, the overall proportion of candidates penalised for malpractice at A level and GCSE remained extremely low, at around 0.06 per cent of the number of results, or less than one in every 1,500 results, the same as in 2005.

For the candidates penalised for malpractice, the following penalties were issued:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of candidates with:	2,474	956	1,327
▪ a warning	978	481	310
▪ loss of marks (but not loss of qualification)	1,173	311	729
▪ loss of qualification	323	164	288

Just over one-third of candidate malpractice cases involved warnings for candidates, with no loss of marks. Almost one-half of candidates penalised for malpractice lost marks for an individual question paper, but could still complete the qualification, and around one-sixth of the candidates penalised for malpractice were prevented from completing the qualification. As in previous years, a small number of candidates were disqualified from all qualifications due to malpractice.

Awarding bodies also provided QCA with information on the different types of malpractice penalised at A level and GCSE for the June 2006 series:

	AQA	Edexcel	OCR
Number of candidates penalised:	2,474 (1,897)	956 (888)	1,327 (1,762)
▪ introducing unauthorised material into an examination room*	982 (877)	351 (355)	573 (655)
▪ copying from other candidates, collusion and plagiarism (including misuse of ICT)	757 (433)	373 (344)	397 (637)
▪ disruptive behaviour in the examination room (including use of offensive language)	289 (61)	71 (67)	103 (172)
▪ including inappropriate, offensive or obscene material in exam papers or coursework	231 (114)	12 (14)	128 (80)
▪ obtaining, receiving, exchanging or attempting to pass information that could be related to an examination	112 (303)	97 (67)	67 (65)
▪ failing to follow awarding body supervision requirements	44 (55)	16 (18)	43 (21)
▪ failing to follow instructions from invigilators, supervisors or the awarding body	38 (20)	6 (7)	12 (106)
▪ other[†]	21 (34)	30 (16)	4 (26)

Equivalent figures for 2005 are provided in brackets. These figures are for the number of candidates penalised by awarding bodies. An individual candidate may by penalised for more than one examination paper and by more than one awarding body. *Notes or notes in the wrong format, study guides, materials with prohibited annotations, calculators and dictionaries where prohibited, personal stereos and mobile phones. †Misusing examination materials, deliberate destruction of work, personation, theft, altering results documents or other behaviour that undermines the integrity of the examination.

There was no significant change in the different types of malpractice that candidates were penalised for between 2005 and 2006. As in 2005, the most common type of malpractice was the introduction of unauthorised material into the examination room, which again accounted for about two-fifths of the total. Within this category, two-thirds of cases related to mobile phones or other electronic communication devices, or 1,276 candidates in total, around one-quarter of the total as in 2005. Similarly, in 2006 one-third of the candidates penalised for malpractice were penalised for plagiarism, failure to acknowledge sources, copying from other candidates or collusion.

Although the incidence of candidate malpractice remains low, it is essential that it is actively addressed to ensure that learners, parents and employers can continue to have confidence in the examination system. QCA is working with awarding bodies to ensure that centres, candidates and parents fully understand the penalties and consequences of malpractice, particularly in relation to plagiarism, copying and collusion.

Tackling malpractice

In 2006, QCA commissioned Professor Jean Underwood, from Nottingham Trent University, to produce a review of current knowledge on the impact of digital technologies on dishonest practice by students in supervised and unsupervised assessments. Professor Underwood's report, published in December, drew on research evidence from national and international sources, and has encouraged debate on this important topic. In 2007, QCA is continuing to raise awareness of malpractice and approaches to preventing and detecting malpractice by candidates, with the involvement of the Plagiarism Advisory Service for higher education.

Centre malpractice

In addition to candidate malpractice, awarding bodies are required to investigate and penalise centres and centre staff involved in malpractice. The penalties for centre malpractice include warnings and increased inspection, supervision or observation by awarding bodies at the centre. Awarding bodies may refuse to accept entries from particular centres and centres can be deregistered. The number of incidents of centre malpractice was very low, with two awarding bodies deregistering one of their centres in 2006.

Theft of question papers

During the June examination series, Edexcel became aware of rumours that an A level mathematics question paper had been stolen before the date of the examination from a secure area used to store papers in a centre. Edexcel informed QCA that copies of the paper were allegedly available for sale and that it had sent members of its compliance team to investigate.

Edexcel took action to maintain the integrity of the examination and was able to trace the source of the leak. Edexcel interviewed 70 candidates and teaching staff across a number of centres, and around 30 candidates were penalised for malpractice, with penalties imposed depending on the nature of their involvement, including loss of all results for this series and debarment from future examination series. Edexcel is helping centres to review procedures

relating to the security of confidential materials and hopes to innovate in this area by using a range of technologies to help prevent the theft of examination papers.

Actions for QCA in 2007

As regulator of the three awarding bodies based in England that provide GCSE and A level qualifications, QCA monitors and reports on the performance of each awarding body every year, and information from our monitoring activities in 2006 has been used to identify priorities for further regulatory action in 2007.

In 2007, QCA will monitor and report on the performance of these awarding bodies against the expectations in this report and the requirements of the code of practice.

In addition, QCA will:

- monitor the performance of awarding bodies in response to scrutiny report recommendations

- monitor the operation of electronic marking and other innovations in each awarding body

- ensure actions identified in response to QCA's review of A level and GCSE coursework arrangements are implemented

- aim to ensure centres, candidates and parents fully understand the penalties and consequences of malpractice

- investigate, monitor and report on the processes for writing question papers and mark schemes to ensure confidence in the marking process

- monitor and report on awarding bodies' processes for approving requests for candidates with particular assessment requirements

- monitor the provision and success of new qualifications as they are introduced.

Appendix

Terms used in this report

awarding body   an organisation recognised by QCA for the purpose of awarding GCSE and A level qualifications

centre   an organisation (such as a school or college) accountable to an awarding body for the assessment arrangements leading to a qualification

examination paper   a candidate's response to a question paper

question paper   all assessment materials used in a timetabled examination. Question papers are dispatched by secure courier and stored securely at centres until the examination

Data used to compile this report comes from awarding bodies through NAA.

Terms used in the performance expectations

Question papers dispatched to centres on time: assessment materials for use in timed examinations that were received at least one week before the timetabled date of the examination.

Question papers without errors: question papers with no significant typographical errors, missing or invalid information. This does not include question papers with minor typographical errors (such as missing full stops) or sporadic printing errors that will not have implications on the content of the paper or any influence on candidates' responses.

Examination results issued to centres on time: examination results at unit and/or qualification level issued to centres on the agreed publication date. This target only relates to results for candidate entries submitted by centres on or before the agreed closing date for entries. It does not include examination results for candidate entries submitted by centres after the agreed closing date, for example late or 'pirate' entries.

Priority enquiry about examination results completed within 20 days of receipt: a priority service is provided for enquiries about examination results for candidates whose place in higher or further education depends on the outcome of an enquiry about a result. The services

available include clerical checks and re-marking of candidates' work. Enquiries about results may result in candidates' grades being confirmed, raised or lowered.

Examination papers copied and sent out at least 10 days before the deadline for receipt of enquiries about results: a service is available to allow centres to receive copies of examination papers for A level qualifications after the publication of results for the sole purpose of deciding whether or not to request an enquiry about an A level examination result (at unit and/or qualification level). Requests for examination papers must be dispatched in time to arrive at the awarding body no later than eight days after the publication of results.

A levels and GCSEs

For the purposes of this report, the following definitions of A level and GCSE are used:

- **A level**: GCE single award or double award, AS GCE single award or double award (including applied GCEs)
- **GCSE**: GCSE single award or double award, GCSE short course and GCSE in vocational subject double award.

The figures in this report do not include GNVQ or Advanced Extension Awards.

For the June 2006 examination series, AQA, Edexcel and OCR produced around:

- 5.39 million GCSE examination results (AQA 53 per cent, Edexcel 24 per cent and OCR 23 per cent)
- 1.94 million A level examination results (AQA 45 per cent, Edexcel 28 per cent and OCR 27 per cent).

The market share of each awarding body has not changed significantly in the past year. Since the introduction of GCSEs in vocational subject areas in 2004, the number of examination results for GCSEs in vocational subjects remains small in comparison to the number of GCSE examination results. However, candidate numbers continue to increase, and now represents around 3 per cent of the total number of GCSE examinations. QCA will continue to monitor the provision and success of new qualifications as they are introduced.