

The New GCSE Examinations

Findings from the Monitoring of New Qualifications
in French, Business and Geography 2010–11



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Executive summary

In 2010–11, The Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) monitored a sample of the new GCSE qualifications offered by the three England-based awarding organisations: AQA, Edexcel and OCR. The sample consisted of French for AQA, Business for Edexcel and Geography for OCR. These were for first teaching from September 2009, and we chose them to represent various subjects and in particular the various approaches to controlled assessment. We have outlined the main changes in the new GCSEs in this report.

We reviewed each of the assessments in the GCSE qualifications monitored. For the written papers, the issues related mainly to level of demand and quality of mark schemes. For the controlled assessments, they related mainly to level of demand, including across optional tasks and quality of marking criteria. We will ensure that awarding organisations address these issues for future examination series.

We concluded that these new specifications and their assessments were generally of an appropriate level of demand for GCSE, with opportunities for candidates of different levels of ability to show, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. The samples of candidates' work reviewed were generally in line with the published grade descriptions.

Each of the awarding organisations held a number of centre training meetings designed to give advice and guidance on the teaching and assessment of the new GCSE qualifications. We concluded that the meetings observed as part of our monitoring were conducted to the appropriate standard and that the associated guidance and materials provided were suitable.

As part of our overall work to set and maintain standards in the new GCSE qualifications, we reviewed the outcomes of awarding before results were published. We were satisfied that consistent standards had been applied and that candidates could have confidence that results in 2011 were in line with results from 2010.

Introduction

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. Our work will ensure that learners get the results merited by their work, and that the qualifications that they receive count, 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:

- *General Conditions of Recognition* (Ofqual, 2011) (www.ofqual.gov.uk/for-awarding-organisations/96-articles/611-the-general-conditions-of-recognition)

- *GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice* (Ofqual, 2011) (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 how the awarding organisations meet the requirements of the code of practice and the general conditions of recognition. One of these activities is the scrutiny programme. This is an in-depth study of the assessment process across a sample of qualifications being offered by the different awarding organisations each year.

Using independent and experienced subject experts, this study aims to:

- determine whether the qualification criteria, code of practice and general conditions of recognition 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 specifications that appear to have constrained fair, effective and reliable assessment
- identify any good practice that is worth sharing and promotes improvement in the assessment process.

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 review question papers, mark schemes and controlled assessment tasks, review a sample of candidates' work to find out whether it is in line with expectations, and consider a range of further information.

Following each scrutiny, we report to the awarding organisation, indicating how, if necessary, it should improve. The awarding organisation produces an action plan in response, which details how and when any issues will be addressed, and we then make sure that they carry out that action plan.

Qualification structure

This section provides background information about the general structure of GCSE qualifications.

Background information

To regulate the quality and standard of GCSE qualifications, the regulators establish criteria for the development of specifications by awarding organisations. Individual specifications have to meet these criteria in order to be accredited as regulated qualifications. Summaries of the schemes of assessment for the different specifications are provided in Appendix A.

Qualification criteria set out the overall structure, as well as the assessment and grading requirements. The GCSE qualification criteria (January 2012) are available on our website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/179-gcse-qualification-criteria).

For subjects offered by more than one awarding organisation, subject-specific 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 are available on our website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/192-gcse-subject-criteria).

For each GCSE qualification, the subject criteria include **assessment objectives**. These statements define the focus of the assessment in each subject – the types of knowledge, understanding and skills that candidates are required to show. 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 particular subject. This helps to ensure comparability of requirements. The units that make up a GCSE 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 GCSE qualification, there is also a set of **grade descriptions**. The grade descriptions indicate the typical performance of candidates, mid-grade for the A, C and F grades. 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 generally the learning outcomes and levels of attainment indicated in the grade descriptions.

The units that make up a GCSE qualification may be assessed through **written papers** or through **controlled assessments**, as defined in the relevant subject criteria.

The written papers can be targeted at a **single tier** covering grades A* to G, or **two tiers**: a higher tier for grades A* to D, with an allowed grade E and a foundation tier for grades C to D.

The types of question used in written papers generally vary according to the subject. For example, for the French listening and reading papers, candidates have to respond to a series of short answer and objective test style questions, whereas Geography and Business candidates tend to address more structured questions requiring responses of varying lengths.

Similarly, the requirements of the controlled assessments often vary according to the subject. For example, for French speaking, candidates have to produce a performance, whereas Geography and Business candidates have to produce findings on an investigation that they have conducted.

In some cases, candidates and their centres (schools and colleges) can choose the assessments that make up 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 these different optional routes are comparably demanding.

For each assessment, there is an associated **mark scheme** (or set of marking criteria), which shows 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 on the accuracy of responses: i.e. whether the responses provided by candidates are 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 on both the accuracy of the responses included and the quality of the response, i.e. how effectively candidates have used the assessment 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 with a statement describing the typical quality of the response at that level. In these cases, they also tend to include some indicative content: this suggests the types of responses that candidates may give.

There are also cases where mark schemes focus 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 mark bands, as above.

It is important that all forms of assessment for a qualification differentiate effectively. This means that candidates, whatever their ability level, should all have the opportunity to show 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.

Also, it is important that assessments discriminate effectively. This means that 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 majority of the new GCSE qualifications were available for first teaching from September 2009. The main changes to the new qualifications are as follows:

- They tend to be unitised (so candidates can take the assessments at various stages throughout the course as opposed to taking them all at the end).
- They are made up of a maximum of four units.
- The introduction of a terminal requirement means that at least 40 per cent (but up to 100 per cent) of the assessment (of whatever type) for the whole qualification must take place at the end of the course.
- Candidates may resit each unit only once.
- Controlled assessments have replaced coursework in most subjects. These apply control to assessment at three levels (limited, medium and high) at three critical points (task setting, task taking and task marking). They account for either 60 per cent of the assessment (as in GCSE French), 25 per cent of the assessment (as in GCSE Business and GCSE Geography), or none of the assessment.

The following summary shows the main changes in the GCSE qualifications that were monitored.

Qualification	Previous structure	New structure
AQA French	<i>Either three written papers plus one speaking test or two written papers plus one piece of coursework and</i>	Two written papers, two speaking controlled assessment tasks and two writing controlled

	one speaking test	assessment tasks
Edexcel Business Studies	One written paper and one piece of coursework	Two written papers and one controlled assessment task
Edexcel Business and Communications	Two written papers and one piece of coursework	Two written papers and one controlled assessment task
Edexcel Business and Economics	Two written papers and one piece of coursework	Two written papers and one controlled assessment task
OCR Geography B	Two written papers and one piece of coursework	Two written papers and two controlled assessment tasks

Written papers

Candidates had to complete two written papers for each of AQA French and OCR Geography B. For Edexcel Business, candidates had to complete two written papers: one written paper common to all three Business pathways, and one other written paper that relates specifically to one of the three Business pathways.¹ Each of the written papers was marked externally by the awarding organisation.

Summary of findings

Overall, the written papers were clear and well presented; and generally of an appropriate level of demand for GCSE, with most optional routes being comparably demanding where relevant. The coverage of assessment objectives and specification content was generally appropriate. The associated mark schemes were usually clear, detailed and conducive to producing fair outcomes. In most cases, the written papers were in line with the sample assessment materials (SAMs).² The samples of candidates' work reviewed were generally in line with the published grade descriptions, and were of a comparable standard across most optional routes where relevant. However, there were issues regarding some aspects of the written papers.

¹ The three Edexcel Business pathways are Business Studies, Business Communications and Business and Economics.

² Sample assessment materials, including written papers and mark schemes, are produced by awarding organisations in order for qualifications to be accredited by Ofqual and to help centres in preparation and teaching.

Presentation

For AQA French, the presentation of questions was generally clear. However, two of the images used to show different aspects of music were not sufficiently distinct in meaning from one another and were found to be confusing. This could have contributed to candidates not scoring the mark for the related question.

Level of demand

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

For AQA French, several questions across the listening and reading papers for both the foundation and higher tiers did not perform in line with their targeted grades. This was reflected in candidates' performance, which showed that in these instances, questions targeted at the higher grades proved to be more accessible than questions targeted at the lower grades.

For Edexcel Business, several questions on the single tier written paper for unit 5BS01 did not perform in line with their targeted grades. This was reflected in candidates' performance, which showed that from the sample of work reviewed in these instances, questions targeted at the higher grades were more accessible than questions targeted at the lower grades. For some of the questions targeted at the higher grades, candidates could pick multiple answers (three out of six in some cases) and gain a mark for each correct one, which increased their chance to gain marks without having to use knowledge, understanding and skills in Business.

Also for Edexcel Business, the written papers for units 5BS04 and 5BS05 were not comparably demanding in relation to the last question. On 5BS04, candidates had to recommend and justify a method of promoting a business, whereas on 5BS05, candidates had to understand a complex relationship and assess its importance.

Clarity of question requirements

For AQA French, the breadth of a few questions on the reading higher tier paper meant that it was not sufficiently clear to candidates what they had to do in order to be credited according to the specific requirements of the mark scheme. There were several instances in the sample of work reviewed where candidates had produced what were judged to be acceptable responses to these questions as written, but they were not credited for them as the mark scheme required a more specific response.

Alignment with sample assessment materials

For AQA French, the requirements of the reading higher tier paper were not completely in line with the SAMs. In general, questions in the SAMs were more focused, with more precision in the wording, and they were often worth two marks as

opposed to one mark, to reflect the level of detail required in the mark scheme. Therefore these questions gave a more accurate indication of what candidates had to do in order to be credited in the mark scheme than some questions on the June 2011 series paper.

Coverage of specification content

For OCR Geography B, the June series written papers for units B561 and B563 covered only three of the four key themes from within the specification, meaning that candidates entered for both papers in the June series would not achieve complete coverage of the specification.

For AQA French, the reading higher tier paper did not provide a sufficient range of text types. The specification lists many text types, but with the exception of one text on the paper, they were all written in the first person.

Quality of mark schemes

For AQA French, mark schemes were found to be generally appropriate. However, in one instance on the reading higher tier paper, the mark scheme did not reward candidates fairly for their broader reading skills or for different ways of expressing the correct answer.

For OCR Geography B, the requirements of the mark scheme differed between the tiers for the common question on unit B561, with marks being more accessible to candidates on the foundation tier than on the higher tier. From the sample of work reviewed, mid-ability candidates on the foundation tier achieved more marks than mid-ability candidates on the higher tier as they had more chances to be credited according to the mark scheme on the common question. However, higher tier candidates were not unfairly disadvantaged across the paper as a whole, with a much higher mark needed to gain a grade C on the foundation tier than on the higher tier.

Also for OCR Geography B, there were different approaches given for marking questions using levels of response on unit B563, which meant that the mark scheme was not accurately applied to candidates' work in a significant number of cases from the sample reviewed. The principle of using a holistic 'best-fit' approach to award a mark on the overall quality of a candidate's answer was undermined by the approach of counting up the number of statements in the answer in order to decide a mark.

Next steps

We require the awarding organisations to agree action plans to address these issues for future examination series. We will monitor these action plans to make sure that they are carried out as efficiently as possible. Although these action plans are at a

preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has already outlined a range of intended actions.

For French, AQA will:

- ensure that for future examination series (from 2013 onwards), images are made clear to all candidates and there is no possibility of confusion in questions
- ensure that for future examination series (from 2013 onwards), as far as possible, each question in all its parts is appropriately demanding for the target candidates, including in this careful consideration of particular task types for questions aimed at key grades
- ensure that for future examination series (from 2013 onwards), questions make clear to candidates the information required by the mark scheme
- ensure that for future examination series (from 2013 onwards), written papers provide a varied range of text types.

For Business, Edexcel will:

- take action to ensure for future examination series (from January 2013 onwards), that the level of demand is appropriate for target candidates in the written papers.

For Geography B, OCR will:

- ensure that from 2014, when the qualification becomes linear, all four key themes will be assessed between units B561 and B563 in each examination series – for the interim period, OCR will be emphasising that centres should be studying all four themes in the specification and that although one theme is not externally assessed in the summer series, centres should take the chance to cover this theme in the controlled assessment
- no longer set a common question on the foundation and higher tiers of B561 from 2012 onwards
- ensure for future examination series (from June 2012 onwards), that a clearer holistic approach to levels of response marking is implemented across the specification
- take action to improve the overall quality of marking, including further examiner training and improved monitoring of examiners.

Controlled assessments

One of the main changes in the new GCSE qualifications available for first teaching from September 2009 was the replacement of coursework with controlled assessment in most subjects. Controlled assessment applies levels of control not always used previously with coursework.

The levels of control are applied at three levels (limited, medium and high) at three critical points (task setting, task taking and task marking). These are defined in the *GCSE Controlled Assessment Regulations* (February 2008) as follows:³

- Limited supervision (low level of control) – requirements are clearly stated, but some work may be completed without direct supervision and will not contribute directly to assessable outcomes.
- Informal supervision (medium level of control) – questions/tasks are outlined, the use of resources is not tightly prescribed, and assessable outcomes may be informed by group work. Informal supervision aims to make sure that the contributions of individual candidates are recorded accurately, and that plagiarism does not take place. The supervisor may provide limited guidance to candidates.
- Formal supervision (high level of control) – the candidate must be in direct sight of the supervisor at all times. Use of resources and interaction with other candidates is tightly prescribed.

The following summary shows how the different levels of control apply to the different stages for each of the subjects under scrutiny.

Subject/component	Task setting	Task taking	Task marking
French speaking	Limited control	Medium control	Medium control
French writing	Limited control	High control	High control
Business	High control	Research and data collection – limited control Analysis and	Medium control

³ Further information about the controlled assessment requirements for each subject revised for first teaching in 2009 can be found in *GCSE Controlled Assessment Regulations* (QCA, 2008) (www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-assessments/89-articles/21-gcse-controlled-assessments).

		evaluation – high control	
Geography	High control	Research and data collection – limited control Analysis and evaluation – high control	Medium control

Candidates had to complete two controlled assessment units for AQA French – one for speaking and one for writing. Candidates had to complete one controlled assessment unit for Edexcel Business and OCR Geography B. The controlled assessment units for AQA French speaking, Edexcel Business and OCR Geography B were marked internally by the centre and moderated externally by the awarding organisation. The controlled assessment unit for AQA French writing was marked externally by AQA.

Summary of findings

Overall, the controlled assessments were clear and well presented, generally of an appropriate level of demand for GCSE, and in line with the SAMs. The coverage of assessment objectives and specification content was largely appropriate. The associated marking criteria were usually clear, detailed and conducive to producing fair outcomes. Overall, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were generally in line with the published grade descriptions. However, there were issues regarding some aspects of the controlled assessments.

Clarity of task requirements

For Edexcel Business, the requirements on candidates working together during the research stage of the tasks were not made clear in either the specification or the controlled assessment handbook. In addition, the level and nature of feedback that teachers can give during the analysis and evaluation stage was not made clear in the controlled assessment handbook. So there is a potential risk that these aspects of the controlled assessment tasks would not have always been carried out consistently between centres and in line with the regulations.

Level of demand

In the sample of candidates' work reviewed, there were several instances where the controlled assessments did not provide appropriate opportunities for the full range of candidates to show what they knew, understood and could do.

For AQA French speaking, centres may create their own tasks or adapt AQA exemplar tasks. AQA offers every centre access to a Controlled Assessment Advisor who will help with creating tasks; but some tasks were not suitably adapted by centres for candidates of different abilities. From the sample of work reviewed, the less able candidates were often set bullet points beyond their capability, and some more able candidates attempted tasks that were too basic and did not allow them to demonstrate their full range of language skills.

Also for AQA French speaking, AQA's requirement for candidates to cover a series of bullet points was judged to have constrained opportunities for natural conversations to take place for all candidates. In the sample of work reviewed for the less able candidates, the bullet points were often strictly followed at the expense of allowing candidates the chance to formulate a response to those points within their capability. For the mid-ability and more able candidates, as the bullet points were often strictly followed, there were insufficient opportunities for building on what candidates had said in response to each point within the time allowed.

For AQA French writing, centres may create their own tasks or adapt AQA exemplar tasks. AQA offers every centre access to a Controlled Assessment Advisor who will help with creating tasks; but several of the tasks were not always suitably adapted by centres for less able and mid-ability candidates. From the sample of work reviewed, the less able candidates in particular were attempting tasks that were overly long, complex and therefore too demanding for this level of ability.

For Edexcel Business, in several instances in the sample of work reviewed, candidates had written a narrative in response to task 5 on commodities, as opposed to showing the analytical and evaluative qualities seen in responses to the other four tasks. Task 5 was the only task that required the use of secondary resources, and it was judged that these resources had not been used to the same degree as the primary resources used for the other four tasks.⁴ More guidance in the use of secondary resources could have helped candidates.

For OCR Geography B, the level of demand was not always comparable across the 18 geographical investigation tasks, which varied in their complexity. From the sample of work reviewed, some tasks titles led to the production of more descriptive responses whereas others led to candidates showing a higher level of analysis and evaluation.

⁴ Primary resources are sources of first-hand, original information, e.g. interviewing a person with the relevant knowledge and expertise, whereas secondary resources present and use information taken from primary resources, e.g. textbooks.

Quality of the marking criteria

For AQA French writing, although AQA had instructed examiners to consider candidates' work as a whole, in several cases examiners were crediting the number of characteristics – tenses, opinions and justifications – shown in the responses at the expense of the overall quality. This was particularly evident from the sample of work reviewed for mid-ability candidates, who in a number of cases were overly credited for the work that they had produced.

For OCR Geography B, the structure of the marking criteria for assessment objective three (analysis and evaluation), for the fieldwork focus tasks in particular, did not encourage outcomes that were accurate and fair to the full range of candidates. The wide mark bands contained several characteristics relating to the geographical enquiry process, including planning, data collection and presentation, which often led to the accumulation of enough evidence for a minimum of a level two achievement in the marking criteria even though there was insufficient analysis and evaluation shown.

Next steps

We require the awarding organisations to agree action plans to address these issues for future examination series. We will monitor these action plans to ensure that they are carried out as efficiently as possible. Although these action plans are at a preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has already outlined a range of intended actions.

For French, AQA will:

- for speaking controlled assessments, continue to provide further exemplar tasks that cover the full ability range, including some tasks designed to stretch the more able candidates (from January 2012)
- for speaking controlled assessments, continue to reinforce the advice given to centres, in that best practice aims to achieve a natural conversation (from January 2012)
- for writing controlled assessments, continue to reiterate the guidance given to centres in relation to having an open task title (from January 2012)
- for writing controlled assessments, provide additional exemplar tasks that contain two versions of the same task – one for more able candidates and one for less able candidates (from January 2012)
- for writing controlled assessments, provide exemplar marked candidates' work to include examples of tasks that successfully meet the criteria for assessment (from January 2012)

- for writing controlled assessments, provide further guidance to examiners so that they reward the overall quality of candidates' work (from June 2012 marking period).

For Business, Edexcel will:

- for the controlled assessment tasks, clarify the requirements in centre support materials (from February 2012)
- for the controlled assessment tasks, provide further guidance in relation to the use of secondary resources (from May 2012).

For Geography B, OCR will:

- ensure that for future examination series (from 2014 onwards), as far as possible, there is a comparable level of demand across the geographical investigation task titles
- review the mark scheme for assessment objective three (analysis and evaluation) and make changes to clarify the importance of analysis and evaluation ready for first teaching of the linear specification in September 2012.

Wider research into controlled assessment

The three qualifications regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland – Ofqual, DfES and CCEA, respectively – commissioned Ipsos MORI in April 2011 to explore the experiences of teachers implementing controlled assessments in nine subjects: English, English Language, English Literature, French, Geography, History, ICT, Design and Technology: Resistant Materials and Business Studies.

The principal aim of the research was to understand:

- the differing approaches to controlled assessment implementation
- the types and scale of any problems experienced
- the extent to which these relate to the implementation of a new form of assessment – and may naturally be resolved over time as teachers get more familiar with the process – or are more fundamentally concerned with the design of the assessments and centres' capacity to accommodate them.

In general, the research findings suggested that the principles of controlled assessment are well received and that, on the whole, stakeholders and teachers of the nine subjects covered were generally supportive of the idea of controlled assessment. However, most subject teachers surveyed indicated that the biggest issues were logistical: accommodating pupils who are absent and miss assessments, and those entitled to extra time; scheduling difficulties and strains on schools' ICT

resources. There were also particular concerns over the clarity and consistency of guidance provided by awarding organisations.⁵

On behalf of the three regulators, we have written to each of the five awarding organisations covering England, Wales and Northern Ireland (AQA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC and CCEA) outlining the findings from the research and requesting them to take action. As a result, the awarding organisations are now working with the Joint Council for Qualifications to ensure consistency in guidance, improve consistency of practice and reduce the confusion experienced by centres.

We have commissioned a further piece of research to understand the issues around controlled assessments in Modern Foreign Languages, in recognition of the fact that feedback for this subject was far more negative across all awarding organisations than for other subjects. This research is ongoing and we intend to report publicly on it in April 2012.

Awarding organisation meetings

As part of our scrutinies, we observed a large number of meetings held by awarding organisations: specifically, 7 meetings relating to setting question papers, 15 to standardising examiners, 7 to standardising moderators and 8 to awarding grades.

Setting question papers

The written papers for each of AQA French, Edexcel Business and OCR Geography B were set by a senior examiner. In each case a question paper evaluation committee, made up of a team of senior examiners, then met to ensure that the question papers and related mark schemes met the requirements of the assessment criteria from the specification, and were of consistently high quality.

The meetings observed involved a thorough consideration of all the necessary materials. The process for making any changes to the materials was generally effective.

Standardising examiners

The written papers for each of AQA French, Edexcel Business and OCR Geography B, together with AQA's French writing controlled assessment, were marked online using the awarding organisation's established processes. All of the marking was completed by examiners who were subject experts, except for the

⁵ The full report on the *Evaluation of the Introduction of Controlled Assessment* (October 2011) is available on our website (www.ofqual.gov.uk/downloads/category/136-other-research).

Edexcel Business written papers, where some responses that would be relatively straightforward to consider were allocated to graduate markers.

For each specification, the examiners (and in the case of Edexcel Business the graduate markers) were standardised to ensure that they had a well-founded and common understanding of the requirements of the mark schemes, which they could then apply reliably to candidates' work. This process took place either at face-to-face meetings or online using the awarding organisation's established systems.

Examiners and/or markers for each specification were standardised using examples of candidates' work for which the marking had been agreed by senior examiners at previous meetings. The examiners and/or markers had 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.

Generally, the meetings observed involved useful briefings and effective processes for discussing mark schemes, as well as for considering candidates' work. In most cases, examiners were judged to have obtained a sufficiently clear and common understanding of how to apply the mark scheme.

However, there were a few issues: specifically, examiners not completing the required preparatory work 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 controlled assessment units for AQA French speaking, Edexcel Business and OCR Geography 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.

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, which they could then apply reliably to candidates' work. This process took place at face-to-face meetings and was similar to the process for standardising examiners and markers.⁶

The meetings observed involved useful briefings and effective processes for discussing marking criteria, as well as for considering candidates' work. Moderators were judged to have obtained a sufficiently clear and common understanding of how to apply the marking criteria.

⁶ 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.

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 grade outcomes for the specification as a whole. These awarding committees were made up of the chair of examiners, the chief examiner, and the principal examiner or principal moderator for each unit.

Each awarding committee reviewed a range of evidence, mainly 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 tiered GCSE qualifications, they are the A/B, C/D and D/E grade boundaries at higher tier, and the C/D and F/G grade boundaries at foundation tier. For untiered GCSE qualifications, they are the A/B, C/D and F/G grade boundaries. The remaining grade boundaries for each unit were calculated arithmetically based on the key grade boundary recommendations that had been made.

The meetings observed involved a thorough consideration of a suitable range of evidence, including examples of candidates' work and statistical information, 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.

Next steps

We require the awarding organisations to agree action plans to address any issues for future examination series. We will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that they are carried out as efficiently as possible.

Centre training

We require awarding organisations to make sure that centres are given advice and guidance on the teaching and assessment of qualifications. Awarding organisations can – and often do – hold meetings to do this.⁷

Advice and guidance is particularly relevant when a new version of a qualification is introduced. It is important that teachers understand in sufficient detail the breadth of the subject to be examined and how what they are teaching will be assessed.

⁷ Awarding organisations must comply with the requirements of the *GCSE, GCE, Principal Learning and Project Code of Practice* (cited earlier).

Awarding organisations need to ensure that the advice and guidance does not cross certain lines. It should not stray into specifics about any future question or examination, for example, other than what relates to the nature of the assessment – that is, what the chief examiner will be looking for by way of candidate knowledge and skills, and how this would be expected to be demonstrated in assessments. Guidance should not signal any narrowing of the depth or breadth of the subject.

For each qualification, the awarding organisations held a number of centre training meetings designed to provide such guidance and training. Some of these meetings had a particular focus on controlled assessment as one of the key changes to the new GCSE qualifications.

Our observers attended six centre training meetings across the three qualifications under scrutiny – two each for AQA French, Edexcel Business and OCR Geography B.

The table below gives the titles of these meetings and the dates on which they were observed.

Qualification	Meeting title	Date observed
AQA French	French speaking controlled assessment teacher standardisation	December 2009
	French speaking controlled assessment teacher standardisation	December 2010
Edexcel Business	How to deliver a controlled assessment unit	April 2010
	Improving your delivery of the new specification	July 2011
OCR Geography B	Get started – getting to grips with delivery and assessment	November 2009
	Get ahead – GCSE Geography B	November 2010

All the meetings were conducted to the appropriate standard, and the associated guidance and materials provided were suitable.

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 over time appropriate grading standards.

We worked with our fellow regulators for Wales and Northern Ireland and the awarding organisations to set appropriate standards in the new GCSE qualifications, the majority of which were awarded at subject level for the first time in the summer of 2011.

Together, we 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.

In addition to our in-depth monitoring of individual qualifications, we agreed with the awarding organisations a comprehensive monitoring process for setting and maintaining grading standards. This meant that we could be confident that candidates taking any of the new specifications were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged compared 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 that they had expected.

We reviewed the outcomes of the new GCSE units and the first GCSE qualification level results, before they were published. We were satisfied that appropriate and consistent standards had been applied and that candidates could have confidence that results in 2011 were in line with results from 2010.

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 GCSE qualifications in subsequent examination series.

Appendix A: Schemes of assessment

This section gives a summary of the schemes of assessment for each of the GCSE specifications considered as part of the 2010–11 scrutiny programmes.

AQA GCSE French (4655)

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration	Marks	Weighting (% of GCSE)
1	46551F	Listening: Foundation Tier	Written paper	30 minutes plus 5 minutes reading time	35	20
	46551H	Listening: Higher Tier	Written paper	40 minutes plus 5 minutes reading time	40	20
2	46552F	Reading: Foundation Tier	Written paper	30 minutes	35	20
	46552H	Reading: Higher Tier	Written paper	50 minutes	45	20
3	46553	Speaking	Controlled assessment	4–6 minutes per task	60	30
4	46554	Writing	Controlled assessment	60 minutes per task	60	30

Candidates must complete each of the units. For units 46551 and 46552, candidates enter for either foundation or higher tier; units 46553 and 46554 are untiered. Units 46551 and 46552 are available in the January and June series; units 46553 and 46554 are available only in the June series. Units 46551, 46552 and 46554 are externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit 46553 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

The specification covers a number of contexts and purposes that apply to all four units. (Centres and/or candidates can choose their own context or purpose for the speaking and writing controlled assessments.)

Contexts

- Lifestyle: health and relationships and choices
- Leisure: free time and the media; and holidays
- Home and environment: home and local area; and environment
- Work and education: school/college and future plans; and current and future jobs

Purposes

Students are expected, as they progress linguistically, to:

- cope with a greater degree of unpredictability
- deal with a widening range of potential problems
- understand and use more accurately a widening range of vocabulary and structures, including some unfamiliar language
- understand issues and opinions
- discuss issues and give opinions
- give full descriptions and accounts.

For units 46551 (listening) and 46552 (reading), candidates' comprehension is tested through a range of question types, normally requiring non-verbal responses or responses in English.

For unit 46553 (speaking), candidates have to complete two tasks, each worth 30 marks. Centres may use AQA exemplar tasks, adapt the AQA exemplar tasks or devise their own tasks. Both tasks should be in the form of a dialogue, for example, a conversation or an interview. For each task, candidates must respond to a series of bullet points, including one unpredictable bullet point.

For unit 45664 (writing), candidates have to complete two written tasks, each worth 30 marks. Centres may use AQA exemplar tasks, adapt the AQA exemplar tasks or devise their own tasks. For each task, candidates are guided by a series of bullet points, though the response is assessed in relation to the title and not the bullet points.

Edexcel GCSE Business (Business Studies – 2BS01; Business Communications – 2BC01; Business and Economics – 2BE01)

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration	Marks	Weighting (% of GCSE)
1	5BS01	Introduction to Small Business	Written paper	45 minutes	40	25
2	5BS02	Investigating Small Business	Controlled assessment	Max. 9 hours overall	40	25
3	5BS03	Building a Business	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	90	50
4	5BS04	Business Communications	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	90	50
5	5BS05	Introduction to Economic Understanding	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	90	50

Candidates must complete units 5BS01 and 5BS02, and one of 5BS03, 5BS04 and 5BS05. Unit 5BS01 is available in the January and June series; units 5BS02, 5BS03, 5BS04 and 5BS05 are available in the June series only. Units 5BS01, 5BS03, 5BS04 and 5BS05 are externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit 5BS02 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

For unit 5BS01, candidates have to respond to a series of multiple-choice and objective test questions.

For unit 5BS02, candidates have to complete one set task from a choice of five provided by Edexcel. For their chosen task, candidates have to conduct an investigation into a small business where possible.

The following topic areas are common to units 5BS01 and 5BS02: *spotting a business opportunity, showing enterprise, putting a business idea into practice, making the start-up effective and understanding the economic context.*

For unit 5BS03, candidates have to respond to a combination of multiple-choice, short and extended answer, data response and scenario questions. The topic areas

are: *marketing, meeting customer needs, effective financial management, effective people management and the wider world affecting business.*

For unit 5BS04, candidates have to respond to a combination of multiple-choice, short and extended answer, data response and scenario questions. The topic areas are: *communication, communication with stakeholders of a business, business communication tools and communicating via the web.*

For unit 5BS05, candidates have to respond to a combination of multiple-choice, short and extended answer, data response and scenario questions. The topic areas are presented as questions: *How can I start to think like an economist? Risk or certainty? Big or small? Is growth good? Is the world fair?*

OCR GCSE Geography B (J385)

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration	Marks	Weighting (% of GCSE)
1	B561/01/02	Sustainable Decision Making	Written paper	1 hour	40	25
2	B562	Geographical Enquiry: Fieldwork Focus, Geographical Investigation	Controlled assessment	Approx. 16 hours overall	60	25
3	B563/01/02	Key Geographical Themes	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	75	50

Candidates must complete each of the units. Units B561 and B562 are available in the January and June series; unit B563 is available in the June series only. Units B561 and B563 are externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit B562 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

There are four key themes within the specification:

- Theme 1: Rivers and coasts

- Theme 2: Population and settlement
- Theme 3: Natural hazards
- Theme 4: Economic development

For unit B561, candidates have to respond to a series of short and extended questions related to sustainable development, set on one of the four key themes and using a resource booklet supplied in advance of the unseen question paper.

For unit B562, candidates have to complete two tasks, one being a Fieldwork Focus task and the other a Geographical Investigation task.

For the Fieldwork Focus (36 marks), candidates have to complete one task from a choice of four, based on the themes of *Rivers and coasts*, *Population and settlement* and *Economic development*. For their chosen task, candidates are required to conduct an investigation involving the collection of primary data and the production of a report.

For the Geographical Investigation (24 marks), candidates have to complete one task from a choice of 18, based on nine issues-based geographical themes: *Disease*, *Trade*, *Ecosystems*, *Sport*, *Fashion*, *Energy*, *New technologies*, *Crime and tourism*. For their chosen task, candidates are required to conduct an investigation involving the collection of secondary data and the production of a final piece of work that can have a variety of forms.

For unit B563, candidates have to respond to three questions, each on one of the key themes from within the specification. Each question consists of a series of short and extended response questions. There is a separate resource booklet.

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