

Equality Analysis of the A level Reform Consultation



June 2012

Ofqual/12/5181

Phase 1 equality analysis screen

Name of the policy being screened	<i>A Level Reform Consultation</i>
Team conducting the screen	Reform Team
Names and roles of officers completing the screen (indicate the lead officer)	Ian Dexter – Reform Coordinator (lead officer) Bernadette Smith – Qualifications Policy Manager Emma Ramsey – Reform Manager Janet Holloway – Head of Reform
Is this policy contracted out or completely developed/ implemented by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual), including Northern Ireland?	We will implement the final agreed recommendations once the Department for Education (DfE) has stated formal agreement on policy position.
Does this policy have relevance to the Northern Ireland equality duties, or is it solely relevant to England?	A levels are regulated separately in Northern Ireland by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) and will not be part of these proposed amendments. However, we will inform the CCEA of our decisions on reform, appropriately.
If the policy has relevance to the Northern Ireland equality duties, please explain how.	No direct relevance, but the regulator in Northern Ireland will be kept informed about developments and reforms in England.

Date screen completed	1st June 2012
-----------------------	---------------

Relevance to the equality duties

	Key questions	Notes
1.1	<p>Is this a new policy or a review of an existing one? If this is an existing policy, please state why it is being screened for equality analysis.</p>	<p>This is a new policy that will require our implementation.</p>
1.2	<p>What is the main purpose of the policy, and why is it being developed?</p>	<p>Our priorities for consulting on changes to A levels are as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ To improve A levels so that, subject by subject, they are fit for purpose, promoting coherence (for example between the syllabus, teaching and testing), and to increase their validity ■ To secure (and, where necessary, recalibrate) the standards of qualifications and promote confidence in them ■ To secure a healthy, robust and efficient qualifications system in which the higher education sector, working with exam boards, is meaningfully engaged and takes a leading role in the development work; this will permit government and us to step back from the process while ensuring that the qualifications meet our regulatory requirements.
1.3	<p>How does the implementation of this policy pay due regard to the public-</p>	<p>The intention to potentially involve the higher education sector in the design of A level subject matter is intended to increase the currency of the qualification and to</p>

	<p>sector equality duties in England and Northern Ireland to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation?</p>	<p>build further confidence in it as an entry method to university. Changes to the design of A levels will aim to improve the life chances of learners taking them, enabling learners to maximise their choices and possibilities, whether they choose to leave education at 18 or move on to further study. This will help to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, as learners holding A levels will be guaranteed a high standard of education, together with effective recognition of their achievements.</p> <p>We propose to ask a specific, equality-based question in our detailed consultation questionnaire that will outline our commitment to equality considerations within any changes to A levels. This will offer groups an opportunity to provide a firm input to the process and outline specific requirements that could be problematic to certain protected characteristics.</p> <p>We note that our proposals regarding the elimination of modular assessments, following the input from respondents to recent research, may have a potential impact on learners. In particular, we recognise that a single high-stakes examination system may not be suitable for all candidates. But we must balance the requirements of users of these qualifications (such as universities) and their practical requirements against the potential difficulties experienced by some learners. Any issues noted will continue to be monitored over the life of the final, agreed implementation proposal.</p>
<p>1.4</p>	<p>How does the implementation of this policy pay due regard to the public-sector equality duties in England and Northern Ireland to advance equality of opportunity?</p>	<p>Involving universities in the design and development of A levels will secure standards and promote confidence that the assessments assure progression to higher education. All learners who choose to work for A level subjects will benefit from holding university assurance of the standard of study and materials across a suite of these qualifications. Effective buy-in from higher education stakeholders will</p>

	<p>demonstrate confidence in A levels as a measure of academic ability and allow them to continue to be benchmark qualifications that ensure equality in assessing a large number of future prospects. The additional involvement of a diverse range of subject groups, teacher groups and learned bodies in A level development will help to integrate A levels into university-access pathways in a way that does not compromise or promote any single approach.</p> <p>In paragraph 43 of the <i>A level Reform Consultation</i> document we note that A levels: “... must... ensure that students have acquired any specific skills and knowledge that they need in order to embark on their chosen degree course”. (Ofqual, June 2012)</p> <p>In paragraph 42 we note that standards in A levels may require recalibration, if evidence is found that: “... they are substantially out of line with significant similar qualifications taken abroad”. (Ofqual, June 2012)</p> <p>Our definition of a strong learner is based on someone who can demonstrate a mastery of the specific skills and knowledge referred to, and the understanding that this person will be able to match the skills and abilities of learners in other countries with comparable qualifications. This definition does not mean we will not recognise that other qualities are important to success at university, in conjunction with a demonstration of academic skill.</p> <p>Our proposal to continue to require awarding organisations to provide synoptic assessment elements in A level examinations will help to promote inclusivity through a broad approach to learning that equally rewards different areas of</p>
--	---

		knowledge effectively.
1.5	How does the implementation of this policy pay due regard to the public-sector equality duties in England and Northern Ireland to foster good community relations?	The implementation of an increase in the involvement of the higher education sector in A levels should ensure that learners taking the qualifications have a greater assurance that their studies will be widely recognised and held in high public regard. Content that is set and agreed by partnerships drawn from across the university sector will be of equal benefit to all communities, and learners choosing to take A levels can look to pursue high-value qualifications that will help them to progress. Obtaining these qualifications will enable learners to access the equality of opportunity to achieve at university level, and the continuing high value of the qualifications will help to ensure on-going equality of access as well as securing standards at the pre-university stage.
1.6	What research or other information have you drawn on during this screening process?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ <i>Fit for Purpose? The view of the higher education sector, teachers and employers on the suitability of A levels</i> (Ipsos MORI/Ofqual, March 2012) ■ <i>International Comparisons in Senior Secondary Assessment</i> (Ofqual, May 2012) ■ <i>General Conditions of Recognition</i> (Ofqual, May 2012) ■ <i>A level Reform Consultation</i> (Ofqual, June 2012) ■ Reports from external equality consultancies with a background in public-sector analysis and research that have carried out detailed work for us on previous occasions.

1.7	Do you have sufficient information to answer 1.3 to 1.5 fully?	Yes
1.8	Are we working in partnership with other organisations to implement/deliver this policy/function?	No – potential delivery of this policy will lie wholly with us.
1.9	Does this policy require a full impact analysis? If you can give evidence that the policy is not relevant to the equality duties set out in 1.3 to 1.6, and also that no adverse impact towards any protected characteristic has been discovered that cannot be justified, then a full impact analysis is not necessary.	No full impact analysis is expected to be carried out on this consultation at this stage. Following reference to a full set of responses, we will revisit noted equality issues and produce an appropriate action plan.

Protected characteristics in sections 1.3 to 1.5 include:

- Race
- Sex
- Disability
- Religion and belief

- Age
- Sexual orientation
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity.

Northern Ireland has three extra protected characteristics, these are:

- Political opinion
- People with dependants
- Marital status.

Deciding not to continue to the full equality analysis

If you have decided that the policy, practice or procedure being screened has no impact towards the protected characteristics and positively promotes the protected equality duties, then you do not have to continue with the process of carrying out the full equality analysis. Please submit any evidence for your decision with the submission of the signatory forms.

Notes:

- If you are unsure of any aspect of this equality analysis process, you can seek guidance from the Diversity & Inclusion Manager.
- Once the equality analysis screening template form has been completed, please ensure that all enclosures are attached; the form should be signed and dated. Ensure that it is signed off by your head of service. Keep a copy for your records and send a copy to the Diversity & Inclusion Manager.

Signed
Lead officer.....

Signed off
Head of service.....

Print name.....

Print name.....

Date.....

Date.....

This completed equality analysis screening template form might be placed on our website or otherwise made available to the general public or other stakeholders.

We wish to make our publications widely accessible. Please contact us if you have any specific accessibility requirements.

First published by the Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation in 2012

© Crown copyright 2012

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

Telephone 0300 303 3344

Textphone 0300 303 3345

Helpline 0300 303 3346

www.ofqual.gov.uk