



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

DRAFT

Review of the variability in outcomes between centres in Wales for GCSE English Language

November 2012

Why is this review being undertaken?



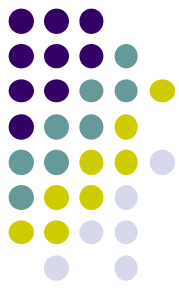
On 23 August, following the publication of provisional GCSE results, the Minister for Education and Skills asked officials to conduct an investigation into the performance of candidates in Wales in GCSE English Language.

The investigation addressed the following concerns:

- the significant fall in outcomes at grades A* to C for candidates in Wales by comparison with the outcomes for 2011
- the significant variations in performance between schools and colleges in Wales with a few centres experiencing significant improvement but with many experiencing significant falls in outcomes by comparison with 2011
- the significant change in grade boundaries for some units between January and June by some awarding bodies.

The investigation was published on 10 September 2012 and can be read in full at <http://wales.gov.uk/docs/dcells/publications/120910gcseen2012en.pdf>

What were the recommendations of the Minister's investigation?



It made six recommendations, the third was:

With regard to the variability in outcomes between centres, it is recommended that the School Standards Unit should:

“In consultation with WJEC and with schools across Wales, continue to undertake the programme of activities that it has already commenced **in order to learn the lessons of successful centres** in Wales and **improve the potential outcomes for less successful centres** with particular regard to **the implementation of controlled assessment.**”

This has been achieved through the undertaking of a review of the variability in outcomes between centres in Wales for GCSE English Language.

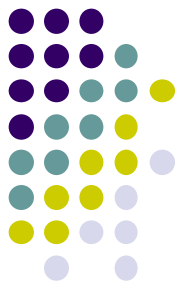
What does the initial data tell us?



Initial data collected from WJEC (responsible for 95 per cent of candidature) and AQA (responsible for the remaining 5 per cent of candidates) and included within the published report states:

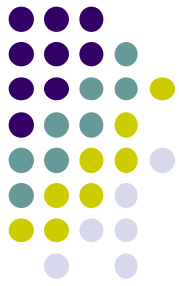
- 85 centres in Wales had centre outcomes for GCSE English Language at grade A* to C which differed by more than 15 percentage points from their outcomes for GCSE English Language in 2011
- for 21 of these centres their outcomes at grade A* to C improved by 15 percentage points or more
- 64 centres decreased their outcomes at grade A* to C by more than 15 percentage points
- the same data for 2011 indicated there were 51 centres who had outcomes which differed by 15 percentage points or more. 21 centres improved while 30 had lower outcomes.

Why concentrate on controlled assessments?



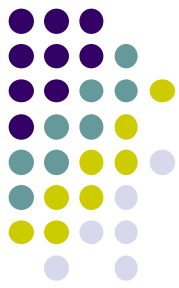
- Controlled assessments were introduced in the revised GCSE English Language to be taught from 2010 onwards. They were accountable for 60 per cent of candidates' final scores. In October 2012 the Welsh Government announced changes to the subject criteria for GCSE English Language in Wales with immediate effect. Learners who started the programme in September 2012 will be following a specification where 40 per cent of their final score is based on controlled assessments.
- In 2011 regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland commissioned an investigation, in the light of increased concerns from the teaching profession, into the first round of controlled assessments in those GCSEs that had been introduced for teaching from September 2009.
- While the moderation by awarding bodies of internally assessed controlled assessments is designed to ensure candidates' work is fairly and consistently assessed it is difficult to be confident that it has been implemented effectively across all centres.

Why concentrate on controlled assessments?



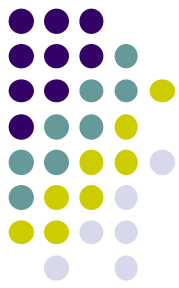
- Until such consistency is achieved across centres for GCSE English Language variability between centres is unlikely to be reduced.
- It is important, in particular for GCSE English Language, that the consistency of assessment and the preparedness of candidates is improved.

What is the scope of this review?



- This review was carried out by the School Standards Unit in partnership with WJEC and officials from the Qualifications and Learning Division of the Department for Education and Skills.
- The review analysed data to draw out initial hypotheses.
- It sought to test the hypotheses by visiting a sample of seven schools that have gained significant (i.e. over 15 per cent) improvement in their GCSE English Language scores at grade C or above. This is in comparison with their English scores for 2011 and by visiting a sample ten of those that have experienced significant decreases (i.e. over 15 per cent) in the same qualification.
- The report of the review examines:
 - what worked in the successful schools
 - what might have been the underlying reasons for the decreases
 - what needs to be done to ensure consistency in controlled assessments for the changed 2012 specification.

What worked in the successful schools?



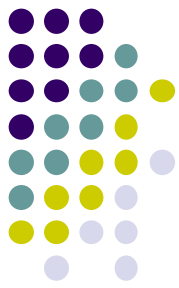
- There was recognition of the need to adopt a long-term strategic approach towards planning for the introduction of the 2010 specification which involved amending schemes of work and resources not only for Key Stage 4 but also for Key Stage 3.
- The above approach involved the senior leadership team as well as English department members.
- Concentration on teaching literacy skills across the curriculum and a focus on sentence structure, punctuation and spelling. Wider literacy interventions were targeted and tailored to individual groups of learners.
- Careful development of materials for controlled assessments which were differentiated to meet learners' abilities.

What worked in the successful schools?



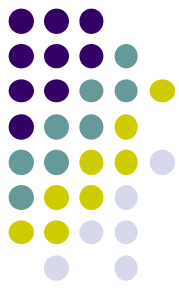
- While strictly adhering to the specification, learners undertook controlled assessments in conditions appropriate to their needs by, for example, breaking the sessions into shorter time periods and having careful regard to the environment in which they were taken.
- Learners become familiar with timed written exercises in Key Stage 3 in preparation for controlled assessments.
- Entry for Units 1 and 2 in January for Year 11 learners but not in Year 10. Analysing the results to inform teaching practice prior to the possible June re-entry.
- Adopting a rigorous approach to pupil tracking and taking proactive steps to develop strategies to ensure:
 - an awareness of the actions required to enable individual learners to maximise their grades
 - learners are entered for the most appropriate tier
 - interventions are structured to meet specific needs of groups of learners.

What worked in the successful schools?



- Recognised the need to have higher expectations.
- Working with parents/carers and learners on heightened expectations and instilling a sense of the significance of doing their best in the controlled assessments and in Units 1 and 2.
- There was a general sense of aspiration which flowed across the whole school from the headteacher to teachers and support staff to learners.
- Some schools increased the amount of curriculum time for English so as to cover the pressures of the literature and language units.

What were the underlying reasons for decreases in scores in 2012?



- In the schools visited there was no single explanation. Some schools had lower performance than expected in the controlled assessments (Units 3 and 4) whereas others had lower outcomes in Units 1 and 2.
- There was some misunderstanding of the fact that until after the award it is not possible to think in terms of anything other than mark bands, not grades. The English department was unable to work out accurately from the mark bands where learners were likely to be graded.
- In some instances it was felt that there was insufficient time during the assessment period for learners to complete controlled assessments and the examinations for Units 1 and 2.

What were the underlying reasons for decreases in scores in 2012?



- Different approaches to the permitting of notes within controlled assessments may have had an impact upon learners. For example, some schools adopted a policy of no notes being taken into controlled assessments.
- Some schools did not take advantage of the opportunity to re-enter learners for units twice.

How can outcomes be improved in future controlled assessments?



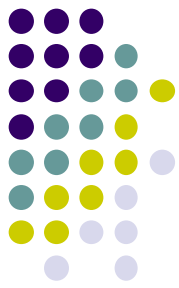
Schools should:

- analyse in detail the requirements within the changed 2012 specification and disseminate them to practitioners and learners, which will be first awarded in 2014. Hereafter we will refer to this as the 2012 specification
- develop learners' skills in taking assessments under controlled conditions.

WJEC should:

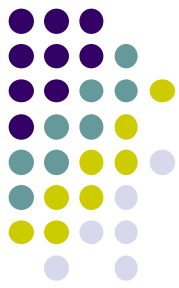
- provide clear and unambiguous definitions of conditions under which controlled assessments are to be undertaken
- publish high-quality exemplar materials at an early stage
- provide focussed training which allows heads of department to share experience and expertise
- provide guidance to support the interpretation of the mark scheme
- reduce the tolerance levels when moderating centres' marks.

Recommendations – Schools



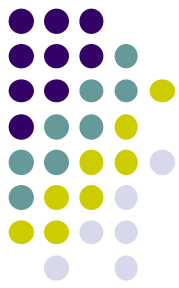
- Undertake a detailed analysis of the specification to fully understand the implications of its requirements and set in place a delivery plan.
- Develop a strategic plan to improve spelling, punctuation, grammar and use of standard English.
- Review their approach to data tracking to ensure that it provides adequate information from which proactive interventions and actions can be taken forward.
- Consider how the unitised approach can be used to best advantage to enable students to attain their full potential.
- Work across school boundaries to share best practice and to moderate controlled assessments.
- Ensure attendance at WJEC training sessions in January 2013 for the 2012 specification and at Welsh Government workshops.

Recommendations – LAs/Consortia



- Organise consortia-wide meetings for heads of department to disseminate information and to facilitate the sharing of best practice.
- Through system leaders, work to improve consistency of tracking and internal moderation.
- Disseminate best practice with regard to promoting spelling, punctuation and grammar skills together with the use of standard English.
- Work with schools to engage Key Stage 3 in activities that prepare learners for assessments under controlled conditions.

Recommendations – WJEC



- Ensure that all changes and implications of the 2012 specification are fully communicated in training sessions and online and that high-quality and exemplar materials are issued early in its life period.
- Continue to provide focus-trained sessions which are valued by practitioners.
- Provide and update regular FAQ guides based on feedback from teachers and training sessions.

Recommendations – Welsh Government



- Build capacity of consortia to support schools to deliver recommendations.
- Hold workshops to provide support for schools for the remaining life period of the existing 2010 specification.
- Provide resources through Learning Wales in relation to assessment and target setting.
- Officials to identify a process to monitor the implementation of the recommendations.