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Reviewing GCE and GCSE outcome data received from awarding organisations as part of the data exchange procedure Summer 2016

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1.

Our review of outcome data that falls outside of reporting tolerances

The process for awarding organisations to submit their GCE and GCSE outcome data to Ofqual is outlined in the data exchange procedures.

We review all GCE and GCSE outcome data. Awarding organisations must inform us wherever actual and predicted outcomes differ beyond a given reporting tolerance depending on entry size:

Entry (matched learners)	Reporting tolerance
500 or fewer	None
501 to 1,000	3%
1,001 to 3,000	2%
3,001 or more	1%

We expect each report of an out-of-tolerance award to be accompanied by an appropriate explanation, supported by evidence, as to why that award is out of tolerance. Where we require clarification of an explanation, or additional evidence to support the explanation, we will contact the awarding organisation to request it.

We will then consider the following questions. All four questions could be applicable to any out-of-tolerance award, but not all questions will be applicable in every case.

2.

Is there a technical reason for the award being out of tolerance at one or more grade boundaries?

For example:

1. Cannot bring all boundaries within tolerance because of the impact of one boundary on another. Awarders' judgement results in a grade boundary set within the awarding 'grey area'. (The grey area represents the range of marks within which awarders agree the boundary mark could be set.) While the outcome for this grade would be within the reporting tolerance, it could have a knock-on effect on the other grades resulting in those outcomes being out of reporting tolerance.
2. Cannot bring a GCSE short course and single award or a GCSE single award and double award all within tolerance because of shared units. Where there are short-course and full-course qualifications and/or full-course and double-award qualifications in a subject, the awarding organisation will have to balance the outcomes of both qualifications. Some units will be common to both qualifications, and awarding organisations will set a single standard on those units that may mean one of the two qualifications is out of tolerance.
3. Cannot bring all titles in a suite within tolerance because of the impact of shared units which must have common grade boundaries. Some qualifications are grouped as a suite of subjects (such as GCSE science, additional science, further additional science and the separate science subjects) that share some common units. Examiners will set grade boundaries on these common units which will apply to all qualifications using that unit. As a result, it may be that the awarding organisations

cannot set appropriate grade boundaries that bring all qualifications which share these common units within tolerance.

3.

Is the awarding organisation deliberately adjusting the grade standard in order to address issues identified in previous series?

For example:

1. To address issues flagged by the inter-board screening. In the autumn awarding organisations carry out inter-board screening: a statistical review of that summer's outcomes in each GCSE and GCE subject. Inter-board screening shows whether qualification outcomes are comparable across awarding organisations and flags any outcomes where one or more awarding organisations are significantly out of line with other awarding organisations. Awarding organisations will take this information into account when awarding in the following year.
2. To action a previously agreed approach to aligning awarding organisation grade standards. Ofqual and awarding organisations may have agreed an approach to aligning standards in response to issues identified with the previous year's results.

4.

Is the performance of the cohort atypical in some way?

For example:

1. Has the paper/assessment structure worked in a different way from previous versions? Awarding organisations may have evidence that the level of learners' performance is not in line with the statistical predictions, because performance was better or worse than expected. At the award the exam scripts reviewed (at marks in the selected range for a particular grade boundary) might show that the work seen clearly merits a higher or lower grade.
2. Is the cohort very different from cohorts in previous years? The profile of learners entering a qualification in one year (the cohort) may be very different from the profile of the cohort in previous years. For example:
 - The cohort may have a different proportion of learners re-sitting particular units
 - The cohort may have a different proportion of learners entering early
3. Is the match rate much higher/lower than in previous years? A lower match rate (the proportion of GCSE learners for whom there is Key Stage 2 attainment data, or of GCE learners for whom there is GCSE attainment data) could mean that the predictions are less reliable than those used in previous years.
4. Are there particular factors which might make the predictions less reliable? There may be factors other than a change in the match rates that make the predictions less reliable. For example, this might be an effect of learners entering with more than one awarding organisation in the same subject, or an effect of learners switching specifications within a suite of subjects so that the current year's learners have different 'value added' compared with previous years' learners.
5. Is there a significant mismatch between the expected and actual learner performance? Any of the examples given above (section 4, points 1 to 4) could result in a mismatch. There could also be other reasons, legitimately unanticipated by an awarding organisation before awarding, for learner performance diverging from the expected performance.

We would expect convincing evidence from the awarding organisation to support any explanation that the performance of the cohort was atypical.

5.

Is there any other relevant factor that justifies the award being out of tolerance?

In order to ensure comparability we will also take into account any other awards within the same subject or suite of subjects made by other awarding organisations.

We review each out-of-tolerance report on a case-by-case basis, considering the specific circumstances of each award and reviewing the evidence provided in order to reach a judgement about whether an out-of-tolerance award is justified. In reaching these judgements we are guided by four key principles:

1. public confidence in the results being issued
2. the maintenance of standards
3. fairness for learners
4. consistency in our approach to all awarding organisations

This process will be reviewed following the issue of GCE and GCSE results in summer 2016 and any changes will be incorporated into next year's process.

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