

# **GCE Qualification Level Guidance**

June 2016



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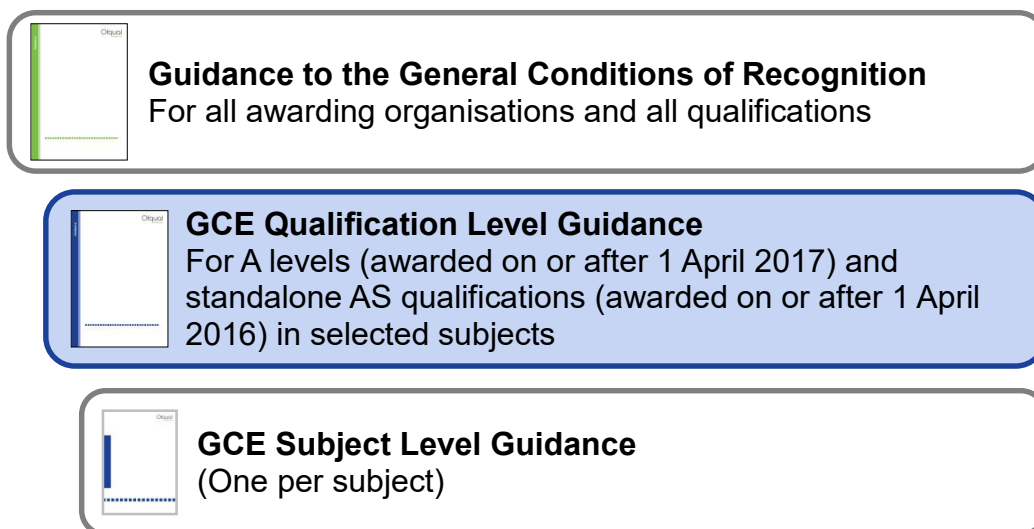
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# Introduction

## About this document

This document (highlighted in the figure below) is part of a suite of documents which outlines our guidance for awarding organisations offering GCE Qualifications.



This document sets out guidance which applies to the following qualifications:

- all GCE A levels awarded on or after 1 April 2017, and all stand-alone GCE AS qualifications awarded on or after 1 April 2016, in the following subjects:
  - Art and Design
  - Biology
  - Business
  - Chemistry
  - Computer Science
  - Economics
  - English Language
  - English Literature
  - English Language and Literature
  - History
  - Physics

- Psychology
  - Sociology.
- all GCE A levels awarded on or after 1 April 2018, and all standalone GCE AS qualifications awarded on or after 1 April 2017 in:
  - Classical Greek
  - Dance
  - Drama and Theatre
  - French
  - Geography
  - German
  - Latin
  - Music
  - Physical Education
  - Religious Studies
  - Spanish
- all GCE A levels in Mathematics which are both –
  - awarded on or after 1 April 2018; and
  - accredited on or after 12.01am on Saturday 9 April 2016;
- all other GCE A levels awarded on or after 1 April 2019; and
- all other standalone GCE AS qualifications awarded on or after 1 April 2018.

This guidance supports the GCE Qualification Level Conditions and associated requirements.<sup>1</sup>

This document constitutes guidance for the purposes of section 153 of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 (the '2009 Act') and Conditions GCE2.1(c) and GCE9.1.

An awarding organisation has a legal obligation under the 2009 Act to have regard to this guidance in relation to each GCE Qualification that it makes available or

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements)

proposes to make available. Conditions GCE2.1(c) and 9.1 impose the same obligation in respect of the guidance below which is issued under those Conditions.

An awarding organisation should use the guidance to help it understand how to comply with the GCE Qualification Level Conditions and associated requirements

## **Revisions to this document**

We have revised this document since it was originally published (see Appendix 1 for details), most recently in June 2016.

The June 2016 version of this document introduces new guidance on standard setting. It replaces all previous versions of *GCE Qualification Level Guidance*, and comes into effect at 5.01pm on Friday 24 June 2016.

## **Guidance set out in this document**

This document provides guidance on assessment strategies, and on standard setting, for GCE Qualifications
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## **Guidance on assessment strategies for GCE Qualifications**

Condition GCE2.1 requires an awarding organisation to establish and maintain an assessment strategy for each GCE Qualification it makes available or proposes to make available.

Condition GCE2.1(c) requires an awarding organisation to have regard to any guidance in relation to assessment strategies published by Ofqual.

We set out our guidance for the purposes of Condition GCE2.1(c) below. This comprises both general guidance on the content of assessment strategies and more detailed guidance on the types of information and evidence an awarding organisation could include to support its assessment strategy and help demonstrate compliance with Condition GCE2.

The guidance indicates the factors an awarding organisation should consider when it designs and sets assessments and suggests the evidence it might include in its assessment strategy. The amount of information that can be included may vary across the issues identified in the guidance, depending on the relevant point in the qualification development process to which a particular item pertains and the extent to which Ofqual has determined the regulatory approach in relation to a particular issue.

### **General guidance on content of assessment strategies**

Condition GCE2.2 requires an awarding organisation to ensure that the assessment strategy for a GCE Qualification sets out how it intends to secure, on an ongoing basis, compliance with its Conditions of Recognition in respect of the assessments for that qualification. Condition GCE2.4 also requires an awarding organisation to keep each assessment strategy under review and revise it where necessary.

We expect an assessment strategy for a GCE Qualification to provide a comprehensive picture of the steps and approach an awarding organisation will take to secure compliance with its Conditions of Recognition in the design, delivery and marking of assessments for, and award of, that qualification.

An assessment strategy should be a logical and coherent narrative that includes clear and concise evidence demonstrating how an awarding organisation will seek to ensure a qualification and the assessments for it are fit for purpose. As part of this, it should include information and evidence to show how it promotes and acts on feedback between the different stages of the qualification life cycle so as to continuously improve the assessments for that qualification.

An awarding organisation may wish to develop separate parts of its assessment strategies that:

- are specific to an individual qualification (i.e. a GCE Qualification in a particular subject)
- apply to suites of related/similar qualifications (e.g. its GCE Qualifications in Physics, Chemistry and Biology)
- are generic to a qualification type or to all of its qualifications (e.g. all of its GCE Qualifications).

An awarding organisation should explain clearly how any separate parts of an assessment strategy relate to each other. It should also explain how each of these separate parts will be kept under review, and revised where necessary, in light of the others. Taken together, such parts should form a coherent and integrated whole.

## **Guidance on information and evidence to support assessment strategies**

We set out below more detailed guidance on the types of information and evidence an awarding organisation might wish to include to support its assessment strategy and help ensure it provides a logical and coherent narrative that demonstrates how it will seek to ensure on an ongoing basis that a qualification and its associated assessments are fit for purpose.

This guidance is divided into two sections:

- information on the processes and procedures that are used to secure compliance across GCE Qualifications; and
- information on how processes and procedures have been applied to an individual GCE Qualification.

Each of these two sections is further divided into four subsections. These focus on key activities in the qualification life cycle:

- developing qualifications;
- developing assessments;
- delivering assessments; and
- monitoring assessments.

Where relevant, we also set out examples in brackets of the applicable General Conditions, Qualification Level Conditions and Subject Level Conditions of Recognition for individual items.

In the tables below we have referred to relevant GCE Subject Level Conditions as GCE *(subject)n*. Such references are to the GCE Subject Level Conditions relevant to the particular subject for which the assessment strategy is being set.



### Information and evidence on generic processes and procedures used to secure compliance across all GCE qualifications

Activity	Information and evidence
<b>Developing qualifications</b>	<p>Demonstrates how the awarding organisation complies with relevant Conditions of Recognition and statutory requirements (section 132(3) 2009, E5.1) when developing qualifications</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how it engages with appropriate Users and how it uses evidence gathered from Users, such as employers, higher education institutions and schools and colleges, when it develops qualifications.</li> </ul>
<b>Developing assessments</b>	<p>Demonstrates how its approach to developing assessment frameworks for qualifications ensures that it meets the regulatory requirements: (D1, D5, E5.1, GCE3, GCE4, GCE5, GCE6, GCE(subject)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes the systems in place to support development of assessment frameworks (A5.2, A5.3)</li> <li>■ States the principles it uses to support the development of valid assessment frameworks (D1.1, D1.2)</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how, when producing Assessments by Examination, it ensures that it meets regulatory requirements, such as weightings for assessment objectives and coverage of subject content: (A4.2, A4.3, A4.4, C1.1, D1, D2, D5, E4, G1, G2, G3, G4, G9, H5.3, GCE(subject)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes the process it follows to produce Assessments by Examination</li> <li>■ Describes its approach to sampling subject content and targeting assessment objectives</li> <li>■ Details any guiding principles it uses when designing Assessments by Examination (GCE3, GCE4, GCE5, GCE6)</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it develops individual questions/tasks and mark schemes (e.g. question/task specification and quality assurance) in accordance with its Conditions of Recognition: (A4.2, A4.3, A4.4, A5.2(a), D1, D2, E4, G1, G2, G3, G4, G9, H1, H2, H5, GCE3, GCE4, GCE5, GCE6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how it ensures that senior examiners have the assessment expertise required to design questions/tasks and mark schemes that will promote validity and reliability</li> <li>■ Describes how it specifies and commissions questions/tasks and mark schemes</li> <li>■ Describes how it quality assures/controls question/task and mark scheme construction</li> </ul>

Activity	Information and evidence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details any guiding principles it uses to aid development of questions/tasks and mark schemes</li> <li>■ Describes how it engages with a suitable range of equality groups and minimises unintended bias</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how any non-exam assessment tasks are set and undertaken to ensure the requirements within and across Centres are consistent and that the intended skills are targeted: (C2, D1, D5, E4, G1.1, G1.2, G3, G4, G6, G7, G8, G9, H2, H5, GCE(<i>subject</i>)1)</p> <p>Explains how it ensures that there are no significant overlaps between assessments and any course materials and guidance that it has produced or endorsed: (A4.2, A4.3, A4.4, D1, G1.1)</p> <p>Explains how it ensures that issues from reviews are addressed during the development of assessments: (D3.1, GCE2.4(a))</p>
<b>Delivering assessments</b>	<p>Demonstrates how it promotes accurate and consistent marking through examiner training and standardisation: (C1, C2, D1, E4.2, G1.3, G4, H1.1, H1.3, H2, H5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details its standardisation procedures and explains their effectiveness</li> <li>■ Details how any wider examiner training supports the quality of marking, and explains its effectiveness</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it promotes accurate and consistent marking through monitoring: (C1, C2, D1, E4.2, G1.3, H1, H2, H5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details the different marking systems available and the procedures used to support monitoring of marking quality</li> <li>■ Explains, with reference to previous examination series (and/or previous examination series for similar qualifications), the effectiveness of the different marking systems it uses (D3.1, D3.2(b))</li> <li>■ Details the principles it uses to guide the selection of marking systems for assessment components with different properties</li> </ul>

Activity	Information and evidence
	<p>Demonstrates how it promotes uniform standards within and across Centres through its moderation of non-exam assessments: (C2, D1.1, D1.2(c), H2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details its sampling regime and any evidence which shows the robustness of its approach</li> <li>■ Details how it determines and applies any adjustments to Centre-marked assessments</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it effectively administers assessments: (C2, D1, E4, G4, G6, G7, G8, G9, GCE6)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details how it ensures secure delivery of assessment materials to Centres</li> <li>■ Details how it ensures the proper conduct of assessments by Centres</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it sets and maintains grade standards, in line with the prescribed regulatory approach, and promotes comparability between awarding organisations and over time: (D1.1, D1.2(a)–(c), D1.3, D5, H1.1, H2, H3, H5.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details how it sets and maintains grade standards</li> <li>■ Details how it collects and appropriately balances the full range of evidence, which may include statistical information and qualitative consideration of performance</li> </ul> <p><i>[Note: Depending on the regulatory approach agreed, this may include consideration of the ability of the cohort, how the assessments have functioned and the extent to which Learners' work reflects defined performance standards or expectations]</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how its expertise in standard-setting facilitates appropriate consideration of evidence</li> <li>■ Outlines how it supports the awarding process as it takes place, such as by providing modelled and/or aggregated Learner marks and subject outcomes in real time during awarding meetings</li> <li>■ Outlines its procedures for internal review and approval of awarding decisions and outcomes</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it scales and aggregates results for individual assessment components, in line with regulatory requirements and in a manner that is technically sound: (D1.1, D1.2 (a)–(c), D1.3, D5, H1.2, H1.3, H5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details any design principles used to guide its approach to the scaling of Learners' marks</li> </ul>

Activity	Information and evidence
	<p>Demonstrates how it effectively deals with enquiries about results and appeals: (I1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Details the services it provides, and the associated fees and timescales</li> <li>■ Details how it ensures all Learners' assessments have been marked and graded fairly</li> </ul>
<b>Monitoring assessments</b>	<p>Demonstrates how it monitors how assessments function as a whole: (D1.1, D1.2(a)–(c), E4.1, E4.2(a)–(b), G1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how it collects metrics to monitor how well the assessments function, such as achieved versus intended weight and component-to-subject correlation</li> <li>■ Describes how it uses these metrics to monitor/support assessment design and support validity</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it monitors how individual assessments function: (D1.1, D1.2(a)–(c), E4.1, E4.2(a)–(b), G1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how it collects metrics to be used to monitor how individual assessments function, such as: spread of marks; grade boundary position; and correlation of assessment component marks with other measures of performance</li> <li>■ Describes how it uses these metrics to monitor/support assessment design and support validity</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it monitors how questions/tasks function: (D1.1, D1.2(a)–(c), E4.1, E4.2(a)–(b), G1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes the metrics it collects, such as facility indices, discrimination indices and performance for different subgroups of the entry in terms of ability level</li> <li>■ Describes how it uses these metrics to monitor/support assessment design and support validity</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates how it monitors reliability and accuracy of classification: (D1.1, D1.2(a)–(c), E4.1, E4.2(a), G1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how it collects metrics, such as reliability coefficients and classification accuracy statistics, estimated at component and subject level where the assessment framework permits</li> <li>■ Describes how it uses these metrics to monitor/support assessment design and support validity</li> </ul>

Activity	Information and evidence
	<p>Demonstrates how it feeds the monitoring outcomes back into assessment development: (D1, D2.2, D3, GCE2.4(a))</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>■ Describes the process through which it monitors the quality of assessments</li><li>■ Details how assessment data are considered and acted on, such as unintended sources of difficulty, including bias generally and in relation to particular characteristics</li><li>■ Outlines the assessment expertise available to provide informed interpretation of collected data</li></ul> <p><i>[Note: the quantitative analysis outlined in this section should be accompanied by consideration of appropriate qualitative evidence, such as from Teacher feedback and subject associations.]</i></p>

### Information and evidence about how processes and procedures have been applied to an individual qualification

Activity	Information and evidence
<b>Developing an individual qualification</b>	<p>Demonstrates that the qualification meets the subject requirements, including coverage of subject content, targeting of assessment objectives and balance of types of assessment: (D1, GCE(<i>subject</i>)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Includes a mapping grid of specification content against subject content</li> <li>■ Includes a mapping grid of assessment components against assessment objectives, including weightings of each</li> <li>■ Describes how the specification meets any specific structural requirements articulated in the subject criteria or GCE Subject Level Conditions (all GCE Subject Level Conditions applicable to that subject)</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates that the specification supports any learning aims and objectives for the course of study: (D1, E1.1, E1.2(c), GCE(<i>subject</i>)1)</p> <p>Includes the rationale for the inclusion of any additional content beyond that required by the published subject content: (D1, GCE(<i>subject</i>)1)</p> <p>Includes a rationale for any optional routes through the qualification and between different specifications that are offered in a given subject, and explains how such optional routes will be comparable in terms of the Level of Demand and the amount of subject content required to be taught and on which Learners will be assessed: (D1.1, D1.2(c), G1.2)</p> <p>Demonstrates that the specification supports progression from, and to, other relevant qualifications: (E1.1, E1.2)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Identifies qualifications from which, and to which, Learners will be likely to progress</li> <li>■ Describes how the content and skills in the specification support Learners progressing from, and to, the qualification</li> </ul>

Activity	Information and evidence
	<p>Demonstrates that Users support the qualification (E1.3, E1.4, E1.5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Provides feedback from Users about the qualification</li> </ul>
<b>Developing the assessments</b>	<p><i>Overall assessment framework</i></p> <p>Demonstrates that the division of subject content across the assessment components supports valid assessment and adheres to any regulatory requirements: (D1.1, D1.2(a), D5, E4.1, E4.2(a), G1, GCE5.1(b), GCE(subject)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Demonstrates the subject content structure across assessment components is logical and coherent</li> <li>■ Describes how the division of subject content across assessment components supports synoptic assessment where required</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates that the balance of assessment objectives across the assessment components supports valid assessment and adheres to any regulatory requirements: (D1.1, D1.2(a), D5, E4.1, E4.2(a), G1, GCE(subject)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Discusses how the assessment objectives are mixed/balanced across assessment components to support a valid assessment of the domain</li> <li>■ Discusses how the assessment objectives are appropriately matched to the subject content being assessed within the different assessment components</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates that the number and weighting of assessment components is appropriate: (D1, E4.2(a), G1, GCE(subject)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes how the number and weightings of the components and the subject content/skills that they assess reflect an appropriate emphasis on the different areas of the domain</li> <li>■ Describes how the number and weightings of the components will promote these achieving their intended weightings, a good degree of classification accuracy and a good spread of marks in each case</li> </ul>

Activity	Information and evidence
	<p>Demonstrates how the scope of the assessment components, in terms of marks and specified time, supports valid and reliable assessment: (D1.1, D1.2(a)–(b) and (d), E4.1, E4.2, G1, GCE(<i>subject</i>)1)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Shows how, in a given exam series, the subject content will be sampled and the assessment objectives will be targeted, to a sufficient extent and at a Level of Demand appropriate for the cohort</li> <li>■ Explains the estimated assessment reliability given the length of the test and historical evidence</li> <li>■ Explains how the manageability of the requirements and their accessibility for the full range of students have been considered</li> <li>■ Explains how, so far as possible, the potential for undesirable and unintended consequences, in terms of teaching and learning, have been taken into account</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates that the modes of assessment are appropriate to the construct being measured and comply with regulatory requirements: (D1, E4.1, E4.2(a), G1.1, GCE3, GCE5)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Discusses how the required skills are assessed using the proposed models of assessment</li> </ul> <p>Demonstrates, for non-exam assessments, how it has considered the manageability of assessments for Centres: (D1.1, D1.2(d), E4.1, E4.2(a)–(d), G1.1(a), G9)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Describes the factors that impact on the manageability of the assessments for Centres and how those have been considered</li> </ul> <p><i>In respect of sample assessment materials</i></p> <p>Describes how a cross-section of questions/tasks (or question/task types) have been developed and provides evidence relating to their intended validity, including how they are designed to target their intended demands and intended level of difficulty, as well as promote accessibility and minimising bias: (D1.1, D1.2(a) and (e), D2, E4.2, G1.1, G1.2, G2.4, G3, G9.2, G9.3, GCE3, GCE7)</p> <p>Provides a rationale for the questions/tasks (or question/task types) used in the sample assessments, including their suitability for the subject domain and for the full range of target Learners to demonstrate their abilities: (D1, E4.2, G1.1, G3, G9.2, G9.3, GCE3, GCE7)</p>



Activity	Information and evidence
	<p>Describes the principles by which the mark scheme for each question/task (or question/task type) has been developed, including their correlation to task requirements and their suitability to credit the full range of target Learners: (E4.2(g), G1.3, H1, H3, H5, GCE3)</p> <p>Demonstrates how the questions/tasks (or question/task types) and mark schemes used will promote (as far as possible, bearing in mind validity requirements) the reliability of marking, including accuracy and consistency: (D1.1, D1.2(a) and (b), D1.3, E4.2(g), G1.3, H1, H3, H5, GCE3)</p> <p>Demonstrates how the questions/tasks (or question/task types) in a single assessment and over a number of consecutive exam series will represent a sufficient sampling of the subject content: (D1, E4.2(a), G1.1, GCE(subject)1)</p> <p>Demonstrates how the questions/tasks (or question/task types) in a single assessment and over a number of consecutive exam series will appropriately target or seek to credit the assessment objectives, including reference to the guidance on these for the qualification: (D1, E4.2(a), G1.1, GCE(subject)1)</p> <p>Demonstrates how the questions/tasks (or question/task types) in a single assessment and over a number of consecutive exam series will mitigate predictability, such as in terms of what they target, how they are expressed and any associated stimulus materials: (D1, E4.2(a), G1.1, GCE(subject)1)</p>
<b>Delivering the assessments</b>	<p><i>Presentation of any evidence of processes and procedures that are specifically relevant to this qualification rather than common across qualifications</i> (D1, G9, GCE4, GCE6, all GCE Subject Level Conditions applicable to that qualification)</p>
<b>Monitoring the assessments</b>	<p><i>Presentation of any evidence of processes and procedures in relation to monitoring that are specifically relevant to this qualification rather than common across qualifications</i> (D1, D3, all GCE Subject Level Conditions applicable to that qualification)</p>

## Guidance on standard setting for GCE Qualifications

Condition GCE9.1(b) allows us to specify requirements and guidance in relation to the setting of specified levels of attainment for GCE Qualifications.

We set out below our guidance for the purposes of Condition GCE9.1(b).

Condition GCE9.2 states that in setting the specified levels of attainment for a GCE Qualification which it makes available, an awarding organisation must have regard to an appropriate range of qualitative and quantitative evidence.

Condition GCE9.3 states that such evidence will only be appropriate if it includes evidence of –

- (a) the Level of Demand of the assessments for that qualification,
- (b) the level of attainment demonstrated in those assessments by an appropriately representative sample of Learners taking that qualification,
- (c) the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners taking that qualification in –
  - (i) a prior assessment (which was not for that qualification), whether or not that assessment was for a regulated qualification, or
  - (ii) a prior qualification, whether or not that qualification was a regulated qualification,
- and
- (d) the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners who have previously been awarded the qualification.

Examples of the evidence that may be used by an awarding organisation in setting the specified levels of attainment for a GCE Qualification which it makes available may include –

- question papers/tasks and final mark schemes,
- senior Assessor input into decisions, for example comments on how the assessments have worked and recommendations for the setting of specified levels of attainment,
- technical information about how the assessments have functioned, for example mark distributions, mean marks, standard deviations, item-level statistics,

- samples of current Learners' work selected from a range of Centres and assessed/Moderated by Assessors/moderators whose work is known to be reliable,
- details of changes in entry patterns and choices of options,
- archive Learners' work exemplifying specified levels of attainment in previous assessment series for the qualification, together with the relevant question papers/tasks and mark schemes,
- inter-awarding organisation screening data for GCE Qualifications,
- pertinent material deemed to be of equivalent standard from similar qualifications or other relevant qualifications,
- information on Learners' performance in previous assessment series, and
- marking guides for assessments where the evidence is of an ephemeral nature.

In determining whether it has sufficient evidence of the level of attainment demonstrated in the assessments for a GCE Qualification by an appropriate percentage of the Learners taking that qualification, an awarding organisation should consider whether the marks on its system reflect –

- all possible routes through the qualification, and
- a representative proportion of Learners' marks for the qualification.

## Appendix 1 - Revisions to this document

The table below sets out all revisions made to this document since it was first published, and the dates on which those revisions came into force.

Revision	Date in force
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guidance of setting specified levels of attainment (new)</li> <li>■ Updated list of qualifications to which the guidance applies</li> </ul>	24 June 2016
Updated list of qualifications to which the guidance applies	23 April 2015
First published	23 May 2014

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