

# **New GCSE English/English Language in Summer 2012**

## **Memorandum for National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People Committee**



### **Introduction**

This document responds to the request for additional information from the Committee about the discussions that took place during 2012 on the methodology for determining the grade boundaries for June 2012 English Language examination between officials from the Welsh Government, WJEC and Ofqual.

### **GCSE English Language – Summer 2012**

GCSE English<sup>1</sup> qualifications were new for summer 2012 awards. These new qualifications were different in several ways. They were modular, so students could sit (and re-sit) units during the course, whereas the previous versions had been linear. They included three separate qualifications – English, English language and English literature – whereas the previous versions included only English and English literature. In Wales, students in schools could only enter for English language (with or without English literature). And controlled assessment replaced coursework, so students were set tasks to do under controlled conditions in the classroom, rather than doing their coursework at home.

We know that maintaining standards is most difficult when qualifications change. Students and teachers have fewer resources to make use of, and they have to get used to the requirements of a new qualification. In recent years, the three regulators<sup>2</sup> have agreed an approach to make sure, so far as possible, that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged by being the first cohort to sit a new examination, to ensure consistent standards between exam boards, and to avoid the year-on-year rises in overall results, which have been criticised as grade inflation. This approach was used for the first awards of new AS in 2009 and first awards of new A levels in

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<sup>1</sup> For ease, we have used 'English' to refer to English and English language

<sup>2</sup> Ofqual in England, Welsh Government in Wales and CCEA in Northern Ireland

2010. In 2011 the three regulators agreed to use the same approach for the first awards of new GCSEs (for all subjects except English, maths, ICT and the sciences).

Ofqual, the regulators in Wales and Northern Ireland and exam boards have been discussing the most appropriate ways to set appropriate standards in the new GCSE English qualifications since 2010. Annex A details the discussions relevant to WJEC awarding and decisions on the approach to be taken in summer 2012 for WJEC's GCSE English qualifications.

The approach for all GCSE subjects is based on applying tolerances to the statistical predictions which have been used by exam boards for many years. GCSE prior attainment is used to predict AS and A level at a cohort level (not at individual student level) in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Key Stage 2 prior attainment is used in England to predict GCSE outcomes for the cohort. In Wales and Northern Ireland, where there are no Key Stage 2 tests, other measures are used to predict and review GCSE English outcomes. These predictions are based on 'common centres' – those schools and colleges that entered a particular qualification in, say, 2012 and also in 2011.

The view of the experts is that Key Stage 2 is a better predictor of GCSE achievement at cohort level, than common centres, which are based on an assumption that the same schools will perform in the same way from one year to the next.

In recent years the proportion of WJEC's entry from schools and colleges in England has increased. In summer 2011, 382,000 (58%) of WJEC's 657,000 GCSE entries across all subjects came from centres in England.

In summer 2012, over three-quarters of students entering WJEC English language were from England. WJEC agreed with the three regulators to report outcomes from the GCSE English award against predictions based on common centres and also against predictions based on Key Stage 2 prior attainment.

I look forward to discussing this with you at your meeting on 24<sup>th</sup> October.

**Glenys Stacey**  
Chief Regulator

17 October 2012

## **Annex A: New GCSE English suite – discussions relevant to WJEC awarding and decisions on the approach to be taken in summer 2012**

During 2011/2012, Ofqual hosted regular meetings with the regulators and exam boards to discuss setting and reviewing standards for new GCSE specifications, including the GCSE English suite. A summary of these discussions, in relation to the approach to be taken for WJEC English language, is set out below.

### ***Standards and Technical Issues Group (STIG) meeting, 14 March 2012***

Attended by representatives from Ofqual, Welsh Government, CCEA regulator, AQA, CCEA, Edexcel, OCR, WJEC

One of the items for discussion was reporting summer award outcomes. Given that over half of WJEC's GCSE entries were from England, it was proposed that they should report outcomes for those candidates against predictions based on Key Stage 2 (KS2) prior attainment. WJEC expressed some concerns in the meeting.

The Welsh Government representative sent an email to Ofqual after the meeting to confirm support for the proposed approach.

Ofqual then wrote to WJEC to ask for confirmation that they would report outcomes for candidates in England against KS2-based predictions. WJEC expressed concerns about the use of KS2-based predictions and about delivery risk if this requirement was implemented for all GCSEs. WJEC confirmed in an email to Ofqual of 14 May 2012 that they would report against KS2-based predictions for their suite of GCSE English qualifications in summer 2012, and report retrospectively in the autumn for other subjects.

### ***Letters from the three regulators to exam boards – 22 June 2012***

In June Ofqual wrote, on behalf of the three regulators, to exam boards to confirm arrangements for review of summer awards. These letters informed exam boards that, for GCSE subjects that certificate for the first time in summer 2012, which included new GCSEs in English, English language and English literature, the regulators expected that exam boards would to continue to make considered use of technical, statistical and script evidence in order to achieve subject outcomes that were comparable with those in 2010.

### ***Summer 2012 data exchange procedures sent with above letter to exam boards – 22 June 2012***

The procedures stated (for GCSE subjects which certificate for the first time in summer 2012, which includes new GCSEs in English, English language and English literature):

*“AQA, Edexcel and OCR should report outcomes at grades A\*, A, C and F for all these specifications:*

- (i) outcomes for candidates who can be matched with their KS2 achievement in 2007 against predictions based on the relationship between KS2 achievement in 2005 and GCSE outcomes in 2010*
- (ii) outcomes for candidates from common centres against predictions based on the outcomes from those centres in 2010*

*WJEC and CCEA should report outcomes at grades A\*, A, C and F for all these specifications, against predictions based on data from common centres in 2010.*

*Due to the number of entries from centres in England, WJEC should also report outcomes for new GCSE English, English Language and English Literature qualifications where there are more than 500 candidates who can be matched with their KS2 achievement in 2007, against predictions based on the relationship between KS2 achievement in 2005 and GCSE outcomes in 2010.”*