ASCL Association of School and College Leaders

Ofqual consultation on regulating academic and technical qualifications at level 3

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

A. Introduction

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents over 21,500 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million children and young people across primary, secondary, post-16 and specialist education. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.

2. ASCL welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation.

B. Key points

3. ASCL broadly welcomes this regulatory approach to alternative academic and technical level 3 qualifications, as it provides simplicity for users and aligns more closely with the approaches taken at general qualifications, which is welcome.

4. At the same time, the proposals recognise the diversity and need for flexibility when assessing these qualifications. We believe the proposals largely get this balance right.

5. We do not believe that implementing these changes will have a significant impact on the workload of most school and colleges, as many qualifications are already administered in the way set out.

6. We recognise concerns that a tighter regulatory approach to these qualifications may hinder innovation within the market; and disadvantage some students who do not perform well in exams. However, it is important that these qualifications carry public confidence and have a consistency of approach in assessment.

C. Answers to specific questions

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to the coverage of content for alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications?

7. Agree. The coverage of content for alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications should be regulated so that students and employers/providers know what these qualifications will cover and what students will/have learned whilst taking them.

Question 2: Which of the following aspects do you consider to be the most important in relation to the use of grading scales for alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications:
> **a) simplicity of approach for users (e.g. through the use of a common/small number of grading scales)**
> **b) flexibility for awarding organisations to determine approaches which best suit their qualifications**
> **c) ability to compare grades for the same qualifications between years (for example through the continued use of existing cohorts)**

8. a). The principal use of qualifications is for users (including candidates, centres, parents, further and higher education institutions, and employers) to understand the capability and relative rank of the candidate. However, all three are important. The approach needs to be simple, especially in terms of grading but it does also need to be flexible so that awarding organisations can determine what works best for the qualifications they are regulating. It is also important to be able to compare grades for the same qualifications year on year, to understand system-wide improvement.

Question 3: Are there any additional controls you think are necessary to secure standards in directly graded assessments?

9. No. Especially in technical qualifications, standards may be controlled by the industry sector as well, so we do not propose any further controls.

Question 4: Do you have any comments on the approach to ensuring that these qualifications are identifiable to users through the use of titles?

10. This is helpful.

Question 5: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to require awarding organisations to produce and comply with an assessment strategy for these qualifications? Please provide any comments.

11. Agree. This seems a sensible approach and would ensure consistency in assessment strategies.

Question 6: Do you have any views on the proposed content for assessment strategies that is set out?

12. Yes. This seems sensible.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to set a requirement for awarding organisations to comply with any requirements or have regard to any guidance specified by Ofqual in relation to a review of one of these qualifications? Please provide any comments.

13. Agree. Awarding organisations should use the same or similar approaches to reviewing qualifications.

Question 8: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to set requirements relating to the removal of approval for public funding for these qualifications? Please provide any comments.

14. Agree. Requirements relating to the removal of approval for public funding for qualifications should be set and published.

Question 9: Do you have any comments on the proposed purposes set out for alternative academic qualifications?

15. Yes. Alternative academic qualifications should be treated in the same way as alternative technical qualifications.

Question 10: To what extent do you agree or disagree that, where it is not possible to fully meet all the purposes specified, an awarding organisation should prioritise them in the order (A to E) in which they are specified? Please provide any comments.

16. Agree.

Question 11: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to disapply General Conditions E1.1 and E1.2 in respect of these qualifications? Please provide any comments.

17. Agree. This proposal seems appropriate.

Question 12: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that a minimum of 40% of the contribution to the overall qualification is through Assessment by Examination? Please provide any comments.

18. Disagree. We suggest a minimum of 33% of the overall qualification is through Assessment by Examination. Many qualifications are already structured around three components and so a minimum requirement of 40% would mean rewriting these qualifications.

Question 13: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to require that only awarding organisations will be permitted to mark Assessments by Examination? Please provide any comments.

19. Agree. This makes sense at a time when assessment by examination can go ahead as normal and TAGs are not required. Alternative academic and technical qualifications already include NEA, assessed by the centre, so it is important that there is an element of externally assessed content.

Question 14: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to require awarding organisations to provide up to two opportunities on set dates for students to take Assessment by Examination in each academic year? Please provide any comments.

20. Agree. These qualifications are often structured and taught in different ways between centres, and so providing flexibility about when Assessment by Examination takes place provides flexibility in curriculum planning.

Question 15: Should Ofqual specify the dates or windows for these opportunities for Assessment by Examination to take place? If so, when should these be?

21. Yes. This would be helpful. We would suggest an examination window early in the spring term ("January series"), and mid-way through the summer term, to align with GQs ("summer series").

Question 16: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to allow exemptions from the requirement for all students to sit Assessment by Examination simultaneously and the limit of two assessment series on set dates, where an

alternative approach would provide for more valid approaches to assessment? Please provide any comments.

22. Agree. Exemptions should be allowed for the requirement for all students to sit Assessment by examination simultaneously and the limit of two assessment series on set dates. For part-time students, exemptions may be more effective.

Question 17: To what extent do you agree or disagree that awarding organisations should set non-exam assessments? Please provide any comments.

23. Agree. It will ensure consistency in approach if awarding organisations should set non-exam assessments.

Question 18: To what extent do you agree or disagree that awarding organisations should limit centres' submission of non-exam assessment outcomes to two windows in each academic year? Please provide any comments.

24. Agree that awarding organisations should limit centres' submission of non-exam assessments outcomes to a specified number of windows in each academic year, but there may be cases where more than two windows are appropriate. Further consideration should be given to the number of non-exam windows appropriate for all qualifications. The regulatory framework should allow for exceptional circumstances.

Question 19: Do you think that Ofqual should require windows for the submission of non-exam assessment marks to align with the availability of Assessment by Examination?

25. Yes. This would introduce consistency to non-exam and exam approaches.

Question 20: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to retaking non-exam assessments? Please provide any comments.

26. Agree. This would provide a consistency of approach to general qualifications.

Question 21: To what extent do you agree or disagree that non-exam assessments should be marked or assessed by one of: the awarding organisation, a Centre, or a combination of these approaches? Please provide any comments.

27. Agree. This would ensure consistency in approach and standardisation.

Question 22: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to setting standards in these qualifications? Please provide any comments.

28. Agree. The proposed approach to setting standards seems appropriate.

Question 23: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to nested qualifications? Please provide any comments.

29. Agree. This would ensure consistency to the approaches used for nested qualifications.

Question 24: Do you have any comments on Ofqual's proposals in relation to its approach to regulating alternative technical qualifications?

30. Yes. The name "alternative technical" does not reflect what the qualifications are about or the family of qualifications from which they originate, and therefore may be misleading to users.

Question 25: Are there any other potential impacts (positive or negative) on learners who share protected characteristics that have not been identified?

31. N/A.

Question 26: Are there any additional steps that could be taken to mitigate any negative impact, resulting from the proposals, on learners who share a protected characteristic?

32. It is important that any negative impact is mitigated and especially on learners who share a protected characteristic. We therefore suggest that the proposals are trialled to test impact.

Question 27: Do you have any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on learners who share a protected characteristic?

33. Yes. The proposed changes to the minimum requirement of 40% Assessment by Examination may result in qualification restructure which may impact on some SEND learners or neurodiverse learners.

Question 28: Are there any regulatory impacts that have not been identified arising from the proposals? If yes, what are the impacts and are there any additional steps that could be taken to minimise the regulatory impact of the proposals?

34. N/A.

Question 29: Are there any costs, savings or other benefits associated with the proposals which have not been identified? Please provide estimated figures where possible.

35. Yes. Any change in the structure of design of qualifications may incur centre costs including staff training and equipment.

Question 30: Is there any additional information that should be considered when evaluating the costs and benefits of the proposals?

36. Yes, whilst we understand that different awarding organisations may cost out their awards differently, it is important to limit cost increases in registration fees. Colleges as providers have to find the cost of registration increases from their own budgets and this is a major issue for most of them, especially as they cannot claim costs from their 16–19-year-old learners.

Question 31: Do you have any comments on the impact of the proposals on innovation by awarding organisations?

37. Yes, the proposals may impact on innovation in the way the qualifications are directed by awarding organisations. We recognise that while a tighter regulatory framework may limit some innovations, the consistency and clarity it brings to users outweighs this.

D. Conclusion

38. I hope that this response is of value to your consultation. ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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