

Ofqual consultation on regulating alternative academic and alternative 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. The fact that this is a second open consultation on regulatory approaches to alternative qualifications at level 3, which runs parallel to an alternative technical qualifications consultation being run by IfATE, reflects the importance of achieving fairness and consistency in the approaches to both academic and technical qualifications used by different awarding bodies. However, the changes proposed may also mean extra costs for awarding organisations and this will, if these costs are passed on, impact negatively on both providers and students, especially given the cost-of-living crisis. We urge Ofqual and IfATE to consider the cost impact of these changes on providers and fee-paying students and to aim for ways to mitigate these extra costs.
4. ASCL believes that assessment must be fair and manageable both to the centre offering the qualification and its associated assessment and to the student taking the assessment. Whilst we understand the importance of keeping other stakeholders at the core of the technical qualifications system, it is important that we don't lose sight of the impact of the proposed changes on providers and students who keep the system going.

C. Answers to specific questions

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to specifying statutory guidance relating to awarding organisations' approaches to grading and grading scales?

5. **Agree.** It is important that awarding organisations' approaches to grading and grading scales are consistent. This should be achieved when statutory guidance is specified. The grading and grading scales should signify to the user, whether student, employer or provider, what is important and what the grades mean.

6. Currently, some qualifications have A as the highest grade and some have A*. This does not help to compare academic and technical qualifications at the same level.
7. However, as mentioned above, we do not agree with any changes which might directly or indirectly increase costs for providers or students.

Question 2: Do you have any comments on the drafting of our proposed Condition (ATQ6) and statutory guidance on specified levels of attainment (grading scales)?

8. **Yes.** This condition makes sense in that awarding bodies should meet Ofqual's requirements but there should be scope for some exemptions.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposed approach to setting out, through a bespoke Condition, titling requirements which reflect Department and IfATE expectations for alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications respectively?

9. **Agree.** However, the titling requirements should be clear and simple and reflect the nature of the qualification. They should not, as is proposed in the parallel technical consultation by IfATE, include long titles which include a range of other information reflecting the subject or employment sector they relate to.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree with our proposal to disapply General Condition E2.1 in respect of alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications?

10. **Disagree.** General Condition E2.1, if available to some level 3 qualifications, should apply to all qualifications and not be disapplied to those which are designated 'alternative'.

Question 5: Do you have any comments on the drafting of our proposed Condition on titling?

11. **Yes.** The proposed Condition on titling seems sensible but it should be applied to all level 3 qualifications and not just some.

Question 6: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ9 (relating to content)?

12. **Yes.** The proposed Condition seems sensible.

Question 7: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ2 and the requirements relating to assessment strategies for (a) alternative academic qualifications and (b) alternative technical qualifications?

13. **Yes.** All eight of the elements of the Condition ATQ2 seem appropriate.

Question 8: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ8 and the proposed general purposes for alternative academic qualifications?

14. **Yes.** The proposed Condition and the proposed general purposes for alternative qualifications seem appropriate.

Question 9: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ5 and the requirements relating to assessment?

15. **Yes.** Condition ATQ5 appears appropriate in relation to assessments by a range of methods.

Question 10: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ10 (relating to standard setting)?

16. **Yes.** Condition AT10 appears appropriate in relation to assessments by a range of methods.

Question 11: Do you have any comments on the drafting of our proposed statutory guidance on standard setting?

17. **Yes.** Standard setting is a very important requirement, and the proposed statutory guidance seems appropriate.

Question 12: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ3 (relating to reviews of alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications by Ofqual)?

18. **Yes.** The proposed guidance on reviews of alternative academic and alternative technical qualifications seems appropriate.

Question 13: Do you have any comments on proposed Condition ATQ7 (relating to the withdrawal of approval for public funding)?

19. **Yes.** The Condition on withdrawal of public funding and associated actions by awarding bodies in conjunction with Ofqual seems sensible, but regulations should provide for appropriate notice being given to providers and students of the withdrawal of funding and the associated actions by awarding bodies.

Question 14: Do you have any comments on the drafting of proposed Condition ATQ1 (relating to interpretation and definition)?

20. **Yes.** It is important that this Condition ensures clarity and fairness for the user, whether provider, student, or other appropriate stakeholder, at all times.

Question 15: Are there any other potential impacts (positive or negative) on students who share protected characteristics that have not been identified?

21. **Yes.** Students with SEND, or who are disadvantaged in some other way, are most likely to be impacted by any changes to assessment. It is important to always have regard to the needs of students with SEND and/or disadvantage and to always ensure clarity and fairness in approach to assessment.

Question 16: Are there any other potential impacts (positive or negative) on students who share protected characteristics that have not been identified?

22. **Yes.** See our answer to question 15 above. Students who share protected characteristics that have not been identified should be treated with fairness and consistency with regard to their needs.

Question 17: Do you have any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on students who share a protected characteristic?

23. **No.**

Question 18: Are there any regulatory impacts that we have not identified arising from our proposals? If yes, what are the impacts and are there any additional steps we could take to minimise the regulatory impact of our proposals?

24. **No.**

Question 19: Are there any costs, savings or other benefits associated with our proposals which we have not identified? Please provide estimated figures where possible.

25. **Yes.** Any change in assessment is likely to bring additional costs for providers and students. This might be additional costs in terms of staff development or internal and external assessment costs. It is important to have regard for these additional costs at a time when providers and others are struggling to deal with the cost-of-living crisis.

Question 20: Is there any additional information we should consider when evaluating the costs and benefits of our proposals?

26. **Yes.** See answer to question 19 above. The impact of additional costs on providers and students from the proposed regulations should not be underestimated.

Question 21: Do you have any comments on the impact of our proposals on innovation by awarding organisations?

27. **Yes.** Whilst we are not an awarding body, we accept that awarding bodies will want to attract new business and therefore introduce innovations in the ways they work. The proposals, whilst setting a framework for how awarding bodies respond in all ways to assessment, standards setting, titling and grading, must work in a similar way to ensure fairness and consistency.

D. Conclusion

28. As stated above, ASCL believes that assessment must be fair and manageable both to the centre offering the qualification and its associated assessment and to the student taking the assessment. Whilst we understand the importance of keeping other stakeholders at the core of both academic and technical qualifications system, it is important that we don't lose sight of the impact of the proposed changes on providers and students who keep the system going.

29. 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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