

Future assessment arrangements for GCSE computer science

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

1. The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents nearly 19,000 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 young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. 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. We understand the reasons behind Ofqual's proposal that examination is the preferred means of assessment for all content in GCSE computer science.
3. We accept and support Ofqual's reasoning that it is not possible to use NEA in a way that is reliable and fair for the programming aspect of the examination. We would not support assessments which would be vulnerable to any form of malpractice.
4. We accept that we need to mitigate the risks of malpractice and, given the ever-changing technological developments, we appreciate that the only way of being confident in the authorship of work in programming is likely to be through examination.
5. However, in terms of the current interim arrangements, our members have highlighted some positives and benefits. Our members have appreciated the opportunity to give constructive feedback to students on the interim project, as they feel this is a far more realistic programming scenario than an exam or an 'in silence' 20-hour project. Programming does not take place either in isolation or in silence. Year 11 students undertaking this have enjoyed it and developed considerable independent skills. Some of our members are disappointed that this aspect will be discontinued. However, they feel this should not be an element which contributes to the final GCSE grade.
6. ASCL believes examination boards should be encouraged to be innovative in the range of ways in which programming could be assessed, and we would encourage exam boards to liaise with schools in developing these approaches and learn from current experience.
7. ASCL members believe it is important that any examination is accessible to all students. If the exam boards were to issue pre-release material, this may mitigate the risk of students misinterpreting a scenario in their program response.
8. We want to ensure exam boards take due consideration of practicalities of the assessment of this specification, in the light of schools with a large cohort entry and the availability of fully working IT suites.
9. We agree with the proposal that the original assessment objective weightings should be reinstated. However, we are concerned that this may result in programming only being taught to the exam rather than the much wider approach available at the moment, which is linked to both Paper 2 and the programming project.

10. We support the proposal to maintain the use of a statement signed by the head of centre confirming that students have been given the opportunity to design, write, test and refine programs, using one or more high-level programming language as part of students' course of study, This encourages a wider approach rather than narrow teaching to the test.
11. We support Ofqual's proposals that teachers will be able to decide how they develop their students' programming skills and how to timetable this into the course. Teachers are best placed to timetable and plan the content delivery in a timely manner, which meets the needs of their students.
12. We agree that the interim arrangements should remain in place for students who will take their exams in summer 2021, with the new assessment arrangements being used for the first time in summer 2022, as this gives sufficient lead-in time for schools and teachers. There needs to be effective communication and detailed guidance and support concerning future arrangements.
13. We support the view that these proposals are unlikely to have a negative impact on any students because of their protected characteristics, other than those already identified, for whom reasonable adjustments can be made.

Answers to specific questions

Question 1 – see paragraphs 2, 3, 4 & 5

Questions 2 & 3 – see paragraphs 6, 7 & 8

Question 4 – see paragraph 9

Question 5 – see paragraphs 9 & 10

Question 6 – see paragraph 12

Question 7 – see paragraph 11

Question 8 – see paragraph 13

14. We 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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