

Setting Grade Standards Part 2

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,500 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 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 ASCL welcomes this consultation about setting the standards for the new Grade 9s. We believe it is vitally important that this proposal is given careful consideration both in terms of managing the communication strategy and also ensuring that the distribution of grades does not have a detrimental impact on students, so that students receive the grade that reflects their work.
- 3 ASCL members fully support the use of statistical predictions for the first award of the new GCSES in order to protect students' interests. We also believe that a wider range of information should be used when the statistical modelling is less reliable to ensure a fair distribution of grades
- 4 ASCL members support the proposal to carry forward the grade standard established on the first award in subsequent years, which comprises a mixture of statistics and examiner judgement. However we acknowledge that the outcomes of the national reference test may also have a bearing of future prediction matrices which may lead to a different and wider range of information being used for statistical modelling.
- 5 We recognise that the proposal for the awarding of grade 9 in maths and English for the first awarding in 2017 is different from the original proposal set out by Ofqual; but it is important to get this right first time round and therefore ASCL supports the proposal to adopt the same approach across all GCSES to provide uniform and consistent results. We believe it is important to retain consistency in grade 9 standards between years and, as no awards have been made yet, this is an opportunity to establish consistency from the outset.
- 6 Given the fact that the grade 9 is designed to award exceptional performance and provide greater discrimination at the top end, this must be considered alongside the entry profile of differing subjects if it is to achieve the desired outcomes and be a fair measure. It is important that fairness is the overriding principle and the approach adopted must not encourage subject choices to be influenced but the perceived ease of achieving a top grade, which might be the case with a straight 20% rule. Therefore we support the proposal set out in question 4 and believe that the 'tailored approach' to awarding the 9 for those subjects awarded in 2018 is the fairest approach.

- 7 Similarly we agree that Ofqual should also adopt the 'tailored approach' for those subjects to be awarded from summer 2017; English language, English literature and mathematics.
- 8 It is clearly important to use a range of statistical information to establish the standard of the grade 9 award in the first year, it then would seem logical and fair to students to base the award of the grade 9 in the second and subsequent years on the standards set by the first awards. As more evidence emerges about outcomes of the National Reference Test from 2018 onwards, the process by which this is taken into account must be transparent, and communicated effectively to all stakeholders, and the result of full consultation.
- 9 ASCL believes that grade setting should focus on the knowledge, skills and understanding which has been demonstrated in assessments with the grade reflecting the performance of the candidate. Introducing differing standards for those students with protected characteristics would not be desirable in this instance.

With reference to your specific questions

Question 1

Please see paragraph 3 above.

Question 2

Please see paragraph 4 above.

Question 3

Please see paragraph 5 above.

Question 4

Please see paragraph 6 above.

Question 5

Please see paragraph 7 above.

Question 6

Please see paragraph 8 above.

Questions 7, 8, 9

Please see paragraph 9 above.

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

Martin Ward
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Association of School and College Leaders
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