

Examination Reform Update 2013



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In January 2013 the SoS set out plans for reform to two main areas:

1. the structure of A level, and
2. greater university involvement in the development of A level content and, where appropriate, assessment.

Russell Group will create an organisation to lead higher education engagement in the future design of A levels

- The Russell Group plans to establish an advisory body – the **A Level Content Advisory Body (ALCAB)** – that to advise Ofqual on the content and, where appropriate, assessment
- The advisory body will focus on the ‘facilitating subjects’
- It will seek the views of universities outside of the Russell Group, as well as engaging with the relevant learned societies.
- Ofqual will lead a **post-qualification review process** each year which will also involve the Russell Group.
- The review process will ensure that the Russell Group recommendations have been reflected appropriately in exams, and play a key role in maintaining standards.

A levels: key milestones

- April 2013-July 2013 AOs review A level content with existing HE panels
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- Aug 2013 – December 2013 AOs review specifications for A levels ready for first teaching in 2016
 - Summer 2013 – Following AO review, Ofqual advise which subjects can be reformed to what timescales
 - Summer 2013 Russell Group subject panels established for some subjects.
 - 2014 - AOs submit first specifications to Ofqual for accreditation.

A levels: key milestones

- Sep 2015 – First teaching of new A and AS levels in mainstream subjects
- Jan 2015 – Jul 2015 – Awarding Organisations submit specifications for remaining subjects and Ofqual accredits
- **Sep 2015 – New specifications in schools for remaining subjects**
- Sep 2016 - First teaching of new A levels in remaining subjects
- Secretary of State's letter to OfQual in March "More details on which subjects, beyond the facilitating subjects, will be reformed for 2015 will be made available in due course. "
- For 2015, the AS will remain at the same level of challenge as now, with content reformed in line with the new A levels.

GCSE reform timeline

- DfE consultation on GCSE subject content runs until Tuesday 20 August. Ofqual's consultation on GCSE regulatory conditions runs until 3 September.
- Autumn 2013: final subject criteria published.
- September 2014: exam boards release new GCSE specifications (for English lang & lit, separate sciences, double award science, history and geography).
- First teaching of new specifications starts September 2015. First exams taken summer 2017.
- Changes to remaining subjects follow for first teaching in 2016

GCSE reform: key milestones

- Sept 14-15 – AOs prepare 2016 subject specifications; Ofqual continues accreditation of those subjects; schools prepare to teach 2015 subjects.
- Sept 15 – First teaching of reformed GCSEs in English, mathematics, science, geography and history
- **Sept 16 – First teaching of remaining subjects**
- June 2017 – Reformed GCSEs exams taken in English, mathematics, science, geography and history

GCSE Reform Consultation - June 2013

Full and short course GCSEs

- GCSEs students would normally study the reformed GCSEs over two years.
- Exam boards also offer short-course GCSEs. We propose that versions of the reformed GCSEs could be made available in a short course too.
- A short course of the qualification could not simply be half the modules of the full qualification. It would have to be separately designed and assessed.
- Students could not build up a short course GCSE into a full GCSE by carrying marks forward. However, students could decide, having taken the short qualification, to take the full course, and if there was common content, students taking short and full forms could be taught together.
- <http://surveys.ofqual.gov.uk/s3/gcse-reform-june-2013>
- The deadline for responses to this consultation is **17.00 on 3rd September 2013.**

Question 40 – key question for us?

Section 5: Full and short course GCSEs

40 Awarding organisations should be able to offer stand-alone short courses of the reformed GCSEs which will not contribute to a full GCSE. To what extent do you agree with this proposition?

- Strongly agree**
- Agree**
- Disagree**
- Strongly disagree**
- Don't know/no opinion**

GCSE Reform

The proposals, which would apply to GCSEs in England, would see:

- All GCSEs become linear in design, with examinations only taking place in the summer (excluding November re-sits in English language and maths).
- A principled approach to whether there should be tiered assessments, which will lead to a reduction in the number of subjects where there is tiering.
- GCSEs graded on a scale of eight to one with a different distribution of grades.
- Internal assessment only used where exams cannot validly assess the skills and knowledge required. Any alternative to exams must be fit for purpose, directly assess what they claim to assess and designed to be resilient to pressures from the wider system.



Annex 2: Equalities Issues

The protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are intended to address the reality of discrimination generally suffered by some groups, including those of school-age children. They are:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Equalities issues related to religion and belief

- **Extract from the OfQual document GCSE Reform Equality Analysis: Literature Review**
....page <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2013-06-11-annex-2-gcse-reform-equality-analysis-literature-review.pdf>
- There is potential for negative impact if the examination date coincides with a period of fasting.
- ... this could, for example, impact on Muslim candidates.
Although young people are not required to fast, particularly if there is a conflict with education commitments, some do in order to join in with the family and wider community.
- A shift to an examination worth 100% reinforces the importance of avoiding clashes with days of great religious significance in major religions.*



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*It is common now for most universities to accede to requests for postponement and re-scheduling of examinations for reasons of religious observance (see Sheffield, for example; or St. George's policy).



Variations of subject choices and equalities issues

Research on subject choices (Sullivan et al, 2010, pp. 6, 9) show some variation between different ethnic groups (and boys and girls) which could indicate a differential impact on certain ethnicities of the changed assessment arrangements for SPaG.13

Variations of subject choices and equalities issues

Religion GCSE, for example, is taken by:

- 55.1 per cent of White pupils, but 59.1 per cent of Indian, 64.9 per cent of Pakistani/Bangladeshi, and 68.1 per cent of Black pupils
- (and by more girls than boys, 57.6 and 54.1 per cent, respectively).

Annex 3 – Technical Paper on Grading

To meet the primary purposes of the reformed GCSE defined by the government, we propose that the key purposes of grades are to:

- certificate students' achievement in the subject;
- differentiate between students;
- indicate that a particular threshold has been reached, for example:
 - readiness to progress to A level;
 - "good pass" – currently, people regard grade C as this indicator.

We also need to consider the implications around how performance tables use grade information.

Clues about criteria in History draft?

Subject aims and learning outcomes

GCSE specifications in history should support students in learning more about the history of Britain and that of the wider world. The study of history at GCSE should inspire students to deepen their understanding of the people, periods and events studied and enable them to think critically, weigh evidence, sift arguments, make informed decisions and develop perspective and judgement. This, in turn, will prepare them for a role as informed, thoughtful and active citizens.

Scope of study i.

GCSE specifications in history should require students to study:

- a substantial and coherent element of British history and/or the history of England, Scotland, Wales or Ireland (minimum 40%). This must include at least one depth study chosen from the Medieval (500-1500), Early Modern (1450-1750) or Modern (1700-present day) periods. A depth study must require the investigation of different aspects of an historical situation across a period of between 25 and 50 years. The British element may also include a study of the historic environment (e.g. studies of local sites, museums or galleries) related to a chosen depth study

Scope of study ii.

GCSE specifications in history should require students to study:

- a substantial and coherent element of the study of the history of the wider world (minimum 25%). This must include at least one depth study chosen from the Medieval (500-1500), Early Modern (1450-1750) or Modern (1700-present day) periods. This must cover a period of between 25 and 50 years and might focus on different aspects of the history of one nation or group or on international relations between several nations.

Historical knowledge, understanding and method i.

GCSE specifications should, through these studies, require students to develop and demonstrate:

- knowledge and understanding of the chronology, key features, individuals, events, developments and issues in the specified content
- understanding of the historical concepts of continuity and change, cause and consequence, similarity and difference, and significance by making connections, drawing contrasts, analysing trends and framing historical questions
- understanding of the connections between different aspects of the periods and themes studied; between local, regional, national and international history; between cultural, economic, social, political, religious and military history; and between short and long term timescales



Historical knowledge, understanding and method ii.

GCSE specifications should, through these studies, require students to develop and demonstrate:

- understanding of how evidence is used rigorously to make historical claims, discerning how and why contrasting arguments and interpretations of the past have been constructed
- the ability to create their own structured accounts, including written narratives, descriptions and analyses.

Assessment objectives

	Assessment objectives	Weighting	Proposed revised weighting
AO1	Recall, select and communicate knowledge and understanding of history.	30-40 %	25-35%
AO2	Demonstrate understanding of the past through explanation and analysis of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ key concepts: causation, consequence, continuity, change, similarity, difference and significance within an historical context ▪ key features and characteristics of the periods studied and the relationships between them. 	30-40%	25-35%
AO3	Understand, analyse and make valid historical claims from:- <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ a range of source material, including written historical sources whose precise provenance is given, as part of an historical enquiry ▪ a range of representations and interpretations of the past as part of an historical enquiry. 	20-30%	30-40% Understand, analyse and evaluate How aspects of the past have been interpreted in different ways as part of a historical enquiry



GCSE specifications should be assessed through external assessment that:

- includes requirements for both extended writing (essays) and short answer responses
- includes the assessment of source analysis in the context of constructing valid responses to a significant historical question or hypothesis.

GCSE specifications in history should enable students to: i.

- develop and extend their knowledge and understanding of: specified key events periods and societies in the history of their locality, Britain, and the wider world; and of the wide diversity of human experience
- engage in historical enquiry to develop as independent learners and as critical and reflective thinkers
- develop the ability to ask relevant questions about the past, to investigate issues critically and to make valid historical claims by using a range of sources in their historical context

GCSE specifications in history should enable students to: ii.

- develop an awareness of how and why different interpretations have been constructed about people, events and developments from the past and why they may have been accorded significance
- organise and communicate their historical knowledge and understanding in different ways and reach substantiated conclusions
- recognise that the discipline of history and a knowledge and understanding of the past helps them to understand their own identity and significant aspects of the world in which they live, and provides them with the basis for further wider learning and study.

Annex 2 – GCSE Reform Equality Analysis: Literature Review i.

- The elimination of coursework in favour of controlled assessment on the surface could be said to reduce teacher under-expectation, stereotyping and prejudice in assessment, which was to the detriment of certain of groups in favour of strict equality, but it also eliminates the summative teacher assessment that Bew praised in the context of primary assessment (Bew, p. 10) in favour of an ideal model of objectivity.
- The proposed removal of tiering in some subjects, likewise, would replace a system in which pupils were tasked with an assessment which (it could be argued) reflected their realistic capabilities with one which ostensibly removes the 'cap on ambition'. This could be seen as an advance in equality by removing artificial limits to achievement.



Annex 2 – GCSE Reform Equality Analysis: Literature Review ii.

- Linear assessment also seems like a beneficial movement towards a state of equality in assessment, though there is little in the research record to support that there will be substantial changes as a result with the exception that discouraging inappropriate early assessment is likely to benefit summer-born children who hitherto have been disadvantaged.
- Limitations on the use of examination aids and any changes to question type may change the nature of assessment, and raise the question of what we are trying to assess. These are not in themselves issues which affect individuals due to a protected characteristic any more than the general population.

Annex 2 – GCSE Reform Equality Analysis: Literature Review iii.

- Grading is not an issue that is addressed in any detail in research with regard to its equalities implications.
- There are a range of issues regarding SPaG that are relevant to a number of the protected characteristics listed in the Equality Act 2010, including for some pupils with disabilities, specifically SEN and dyslexia, on some ethnic groups, and on boys rather than girls.
- Perhaps the last, cautionary, word should go to Tim Oates (p. 3): ‘... schools’ behaviour constantly adapts when qualifications change in structure, and often adapt in unanticipated ways – [this] is important in interpreting the results of research.