



# **The new GCE AS level examinations**

## **Findings from the monitoring of the new qualifications in 2009**



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## Executive summary

In 2009, Ofqual monitored a sample of the new GCE AS level qualifications offered by the three England-based unitary awarding organisations: AQA, Edexcel and OCR. The six subjects addressed were English literature and geography for AQA; physics and Spanish for Edexcel; and design and technology, and history for OCR. These new qualifications, which were for first teaching from September 2008, were introduced following a review of the AS and A level qualification and subject criteria by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) in 2005.

The main structural changes that were made to the AS level qualifications as a whole were a reduction in the number of units for most subjects from three to two, and the inclusion of coursework only where it is the soundest method of assessment and provided it is clear how reliability and fairness will be achieved.

Overall, the written papers and other forms of assessment for the qualifications monitored were clear and well-presented, and suitable progression in demand from GCSE was generally evident. Where relevant, optional routes tended to be comparable in their requirements. There were appropriate opportunities in most cases for candidates of different levels of ability to demonstrate, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. Overall, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were in line with expectations.

However, there were some issues, though these tended not to be evident for each qualification that was monitored. For the written papers, the issues related primarily to level of demand, coverage of assessment objectives, clarity of question requirements and quality of mark schemes. For the other forms of assessment, they related primarily to task-setting, quality of marking criteria and mark schemes, and comparability of optional routes.

Ofqual now requires the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately.

As part of its overall work to maintain standards in the new AS level qualifications, Ofqual reviewed the outcomes of awarding before results were published. Ofqual was satisfied that consistent standards had been applied and that candidates could have confidence that their results in 2009 were in line with results from 2008.

Although AS level is a qualification in its own right, it also makes a significant contribution to the full A level. In this context, this report presents interim findings only. In 2010, Ofqual will monitor the full A level qualifications for which AS level was monitored in 2009. Ofqual will report publicly on the findings from this work in 2011.

## Introduction

Ofqual is the regulator of qualifications, examinations and tests in England. Its work ensures that children, young people and adult learners get the results their work deserves, that standards are maintained, and that the qualifications learners receive count now and in the future.

The awarding organisations that offer GCSE and GCE A level qualifications operate within a clear regulatory framework, which is set out in the following documents:

- *The statutory regulation of external qualifications in England, Wales and Northern Ireland* (QCA/04/1293; 2004)  
([www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/6944\\_regulatory\\_criteria\\_04\(1\).pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/6944_regulatory_criteria_04(1).pdf))
- *GCSE, GCE and AEA Code of practice* (Ofqual/09/4151; 2009)  
([www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2009-04-14-code-of-practice.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2009-04-14-code-of-practice.pdf)).

Ofqual carries out a programme of monitoring activities each year to assess the performance of awarding organisations against the requirements of each section of the code of practice. One of these activities is the scrutiny programme. This is an in-depth study of the examination process across a sample of qualifications being offered by the different awarding organisations each year.

The scrutiny of a qualification aims to:

- determine whether the required qualification criteria and associated code of practice have been met
- determine whether the assessments were fair and effective in measuring achievement by candidates in respect of the stated assessment objectives
- determine whether the procedures designed to ensure consistency of practice and comparability of standards were implemented effectively
- identify any aspects of the specification(s) that appear to have constrained fair, effective and reliable examinations
- identify any good practice that is worthy of encouragement and dissemination, to promote continuing improvement in the quality of examinations.

Each scrutiny involves a team of consultants, who are experts in the subject being monitored. The team observe meetings held by the awarding organisation, and analyse question papers, mark schemes and coursework tasks. They also review a sample of candidates' work, to determine whether it is in line with expectations, and consider a range of additional information.

## The new GCE AS level examinations

Following each scrutiny, Ofqual reports to the awarding organisation, indicating how, if necessary, it should improve its provision. The awarding organisation produces an action plan in response, which details how and when any issues will be addressed.

## Monitoring the new qualifications

In 2009, Ofqual carried out scrutinies of a sample of the new GCE AS level qualifications offered by the three England-based unitary awarding organisations: AQA, Edexcel and OCR.<sup>1</sup>

The six subjects addressed were English literature and geography for AQA; physics and Spanish for Edexcel; and design and technology, and history for OCR. Since the qualifications monitored were chosen to address a wide range of subjects, they varied considerably in their assessment requirements, and this report does not attempt to compare them in these terms. Summaries of the schemes of assessment for the different specifications are provided in appendix A.

AS level is a stand-alone qualification and is worth half of a full A level. The units that comprise an AS level are assessed at the standard expected for a learner halfway through an A level course. The full A level qualification comprises the AS level together with A2 units, which are assessed at the standard expected for a learner at the end of an A level course. Although AS level is a qualification in its own right, its significant contribution to the full A level means that to some extent this report presents interim findings.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Action plans in relation to these scrutinies will be agreed with the awarding organisations in spring 2010.

<sup>2</sup> In 2010, Ofqual will carry out scrutinies of the full A level qualifications for which AS level was monitored in 2009. Ofqual will report publicly on the findings from this work in 2011.

## Qualification structure

This section provides background information about the structure of GCE AS level qualifications, as well as information about the main changes in the new qualifications that were monitored.<sup>3</sup>

### Background information

To regulate the quality and standard of AS level qualifications, the regulators establish criteria for the development of specifications by awarding organisations. Specifications have to meet these criteria to be accredited.

Qualification criteria set out the overall structure, as well as the assessment and grading requirements. The *GCE AS and A level qualification criteria* (February 2007) are provided in appendix B.

For subjects offered by more than one awarding organisation, specific subject criteria set out the essential knowledge, understanding and skills for all of the qualifications in the particular subject. These criteria provide the framework within which each awarding organisation creates the detail of their specification. They also help to ensure comparability between different qualifications. The subject criteria for the qualifications monitored as part of the 2009 scrutiny programme are available on the Ofqual website ([www.ofqual.gov.uk/471.aspx](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/471.aspx)).

For each AS level qualification, the subject criteria include assessment objectives. These statements define the focus of the assessment in each subject, for example the types of knowledge, understanding and skills that candidates are required to demonstrate. In some cases, the individual assessment objectives may be divided into a number of different 'strands'. Since the assessment objectives form part of the subject criteria, they are common to all of the qualifications in a given subject. This helps to ensure comparability of requirements. The units that comprise an AS level qualification must each target one or more of the assessment objectives for the subject. The weighting of assessment objectives refers to the proportions in which they are targeted, both within individual units and within the specification as a whole.

For each AS level qualification, there is also a set of performance descriptions. They are available on the Ofqual website ([www.ofqual.gov.uk/471.aspx](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/471.aspx)). The performance descriptions indicate the typical performance of candidates at the A/B and E/U grade boundaries. They relate to the specific assessment objectives for a subject, and apply to the qualification as a whole rather than to individual units and particular specifications. However, to be in line with expectations, the candidates' work

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<sup>3</sup> The background information would also relate to GCE A level qualifications.



produced for individual units and particular specifications would need to reflect broadly the learning outcomes and levels of attainment indicated in the performance descriptions.

The units that comprise an AS level qualification may be assessed through written papers or through other forms of assessment such as coursework, subject to parameters set by the regulators.

The types of question used in written papers generally vary according to the subject. For example, subjects such as English literature and history largely require candidates to respond to a small number of essay questions. On the other hand, subjects such as geography and physics tend to require candidates to address a larger number of structured questions requiring answers of varying lengths.

Similarly, the requirements of other forms of assessment often vary according to the subject. For example, subjects such as English literature may require candidates to produce a coursework portfolio of extended writing, whereas subjects such as physics may require candidates to report on practical coursework such as experiments they have completed.

In some cases, candidates and their centres have an element of choice about the assessments that comprise a qualification. For example, they might choose between topics within a unit and/or between questions in a written paper. To ensure fairness to all candidates, awarding organisations must ensure that the requirements of these different optional routes are comparably demanding.

For each assessment, there is an associated mark scheme (or set of marking criteria), which details how credit should be awarded. Typically, this characterises acceptable answers and indicates the amount of credit that different answers attract. The structure of mark schemes varies depending on the nature of the subject and on the nature of the assessment.

In some cases, mark schemes focus primarily on the accuracy of answers: whether the material provided by candidates is correct. This tends to be the case for assessments addressing factual content, in which any answer is usually either correct or incorrect, and there is little or no scope for an answer to be partially correct.

In other cases, mark schemes focus both on the accuracy of the material included and on the quality of the answer: how effectively candidates have used the material available to them. In such cases, in which answers can be made at a range of different levels, mark schemes are often composed of a series of bands, each worth a range of marks and with a statement describing the typical quality of the answer at that level. In these cases, they also tend to include some indicative content: this suggests the type of material that answers may contain.

There are also cases where mark schemes focus primarily on the quality of answers. This tends to be for assessments addressing different forms of skill, and these mark schemes usually comprise a series of qualitative mark bands, as above.

It is important that all forms of assessment for a qualification differentiate effectively. This means candidates, whatever their ability level, should all have the opportunity to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do in terms of the subject. For example, less able candidates should be able to access some of the marks available, while more able candidates should be able to access most of the marks available, and this should be based appropriately on their differing levels of ability.

It is also important that the assessments for a qualification discriminate effectively. This means candidates with different levels of ability should all be credited reliably for what they know, understand and can do. For example, candidates should be divided appropriately, based on their ability in the subject, and using the full range of marks available.

### **Changes in the new qualifications**

The new AS level qualifications were published for first teaching from September 2008. They were introduced following the QCA's review of the AS and A level qualification and subject criteria in 2005.

The main structural changes made to the qualifications as a whole were:

- a reduction in the number of units for most full A level subjects from six to four, and for most AS level subjects from three to two, to reduce the assessment burden on candidates and create the scope for greater stretch and challenge in the assessments for A2 units (there were exceptions to this reduction, such as biology, chemistry, music and physics)
- the inclusion of coursework only where it is the soundest method of assessment, and provided that it is clear how reliability and fairness will be achieved (in line with this change, optional coursework was largely removed from AS and A level qualifications)
- for full A level qualifications only, the introduction of greater stretch and challenge in the assessments for A2 units (through, for example, a wider range of question types, more questions requiring extended answers, and a greater emphasis on synoptic assessment)

- for full A level qualifications only, the introduction of an A\* grade at overall subject level (for candidates achieving a grade A overall at A level and also achieving 90 per cent or more on the uniform mark scale (UMS) across their A2 units).<sup>4</sup>

The summary below shows the main structural changes in the AS qualifications that were monitored:

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Previous structure</b>	<b>New structure</b>
AQA English literature	Three units: <i>either</i> all written papers <i>or</i> two written papers plus one coursework	Two units: one written paper plus one coursework
AQA geography	Three units: all written papers	Two units: both written papers
Edexcel physics	Three units: <i>either</i> two written papers plus one practical test and one written test <i>or</i> two written papers plus one coursework	Three units: two written papers plus one coursework
Edexcel Spanish	Three units: two written papers plus one speaking test	Two units: one written paper plus one speaking test
OCR design and technology	Three units: two coursework plus one written paper	Two units: one coursework plus one design challenge
OCR history	Three units: all written papers	Two units: both written papers

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<sup>4</sup> The UMS is a means of ensuring that candidates' performance can be compared reliably across different qualifications and over time. Further information about the UMS is available on the Ofqual website ([www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/A-levelGuide.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/A-levelGuide.pdf)).

## Written papers

Candidates were required to complete one written paper for each of AQA English literature A and B, Edexcel Spanish, and OCR design and technology.<sup>5</sup> Candidates were required to complete two written papers for each of AQA geography, Edexcel physics, and OCR history A and B. Each of the written papers was marked externally by the awarding organisation.

### Summary of findings

Overall, the written papers were clear and well-presented, and there was generally a suitable progression in demand from GCSE. Where relevant, the written papers tended to cover an appropriate range of the subject content listed in the specification, and optional routes tended to be comparable in their requirements. There were appropriate opportunities in most cases for candidates of different levels of ability to demonstrate, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. Overall, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were in line with expectations, and, where relevant, were of a comparable standard across optional routes.

However, there were issues regarding some aspects of the written papers. They related primarily to level of demand, coverage of assessment objectives, clarity of question requirements and quality of mark schemes.

### Level of demand

In two instances, the written papers did not provide enough opportunities for more able candidates to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do.

For AQA geography, the written paper for unit GEOG2 generally addressed lower order skills, and there was a high level of structuring in the questions.

For Edexcel physics, the written papers for units 6PH01 and 6PH02 provided limited opportunities for higher order skills such as extended explanation and discussion.

As a result, the samples of candidates' work reviewed in each case were below expectations at the A/B grade boundaries.

In two instances, the written papers did not provide enough opportunities for candidates of all levels of ability to demonstrate what they knew, understood and could do.

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<sup>5</sup> In the case of OCR design and technology, this written paper was one component of a larger unit comprising a design challenge.

For AQA geography, the written paper for unit GEOG1 was excessively demanding, even for more able candidates. This was owing to the large amount of extended writing that some questions required in the time available, the relatively narrow coverage of the subject content listed in the specification in some cases, and the wording of the extended questions often being complex. As a result, the sample of candidates' work reviewed was below expectations.

For OCR design and technology, the written paper component of unit F521 was relatively undemanding in its requirements.

### **Coverage of assessment objectives**

In some instances, the coverage of assessment objectives in the written papers was limited and/or varied across optional routes.

For AQA geography, there were limited opportunities in the written papers for units GEOG1 and GEOG2 for candidates to demonstrate AO2 and AO3. (AO2 relates broadly to analysis, interpretation, evaluation and application of understanding, and AO3 relates broadly to use of methods, skills and techniques to investigate, conclude and communicate.) In the case of unit GEOG2, the assessment of AO3 did not require candidates to refer sufficiently to their specific fieldwork. In the case of unit GEOG1, the issues noted above relating to level of demand also restricted opportunities for candidates to demonstrate AO1. (AO1 relates broadly to demonstration of knowledge and understanding.)

For OCR history A, the assessment of the interpretations element of AO2b in the written papers for units F963/64 was relatively narrow in its scope (with candidates not, for example, required to adapt or create interpretations). For OCR history B, the focus in the written papers for units F981/82 was on the causation element of AO1b, rather than the other elements (consequence, continuity, change and significance within an historical context). This was owing to the approach to assessing history adopted in this specification. For each of these issues, the approach in the alternative specification was more appropriate.

### **Clarity of question requirements**

In two instances, the requirements of questions were not clear enough to candidates.

For AQA English literature A, the wording of the questions in section A of the written papers for unit LTA1 did not direct candidates explicitly to address AO4, which was the main assessment objective targeted. (AO4 relates broadly to understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which literary texts are written and received.) This requirement was more explicit in the sample assessment materials that had been accredited. Furthermore, only one of the two optional questions for each set text in section B of the written papers for this unit directed candidates explicitly to address AO2, which was one of three equally weighted assessment

objectives targeted. (AO2 relates broadly to understanding of the ways in which structure, form and language shape meanings.)

For Edexcel physics, there was not enough guidance to candidates, in the written papers for units 6PH01 and 6PH02, on the way in which the quality of their written communication would be assessed.

### **Quality of mark schemes**

In some instances, the mark schemes for the written papers were not clear and detailed enough to be applied consistently by examiners.

For AQA English literature A and B, the amount of indicative content provided in the mark schemes for individual questions was sometimes limited. For section A of unit LTA1, the mark bands in the mark schemes were relatively wide and the weightings for the different assessment objectives varied considerably. The mark schemes provided little guidance to examiners on determining levels of candidate performance within mark bands or on how the different assessment objective weightings should be taken into account when marking answers.

For AQA geography, the level descriptors for individual questions for unit GEOG1 were not always clear or detailed enough. There was little guidance to examiners in relation to applying the indicative content for some questions, and the mark scheme requirements did not always reflect the wording of questions. For units GEOG1 and GEOG2, there was some variation in the number of marks in each band of the mark scheme. The number of marks per band was more consistent in the sample assessment materials that had been accredited.

For Edexcel physics, the mark schemes for units 6PH01 and 6PH02 did not always include enough guidance to examiners on the need for candidates to indicate the relevant units of measurement for all calculations, and also on how the quality of candidates' written communication would be assessed. Furthermore, in some cases, the mark scheme requirements for these units did not reflect the wording of questions.

For Edexcel Spanish, the mark scheme for some short written response questions for unit 6SP02 did not provide enough guidance to examiners on the acceptability of inaccurate Spanish or on the extent to which candidates could be credited for using language provided in the questions.

For OCR design and technology, the mark scheme for the written paper component of unit F521 gave limited guidance to examiners about allocating marks.

For OCR history A, several factors meant the mark schemes were not conducive to being applied consistently by examiners. These factors included variation in the

number of marks in each band of the mark scheme for a given assessment objective strand; the different assessment objective strands being weighted inconsistently across the different mark bands; and a lack of clarity in the progression between the mark bands for a given assessment objective strand, owing to inconsistent wording in the level descriptors in some cases.

### **Next steps**

Ofqual now requires the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately. Although these action plans are currently at a preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has outlined a range of actions.

For English literature A and B, AQA will:

- ensure, for section B of unit LTA1, that all future questions refer explicitly to the need for candidates to demonstrate AO2
- review the amount of indicative content provided in all future mark schemes, and monitor the future application of the mark scheme for section A of unit LTA1 to ensure ongoing consistency.

For geography, AQA will:

- ensure, for unit GEOG1, that future questions are appropriately demanding and are expressed clearly, and that the subject content in the specification is appropriately covered for future examination series
- ensure, for unit GEOG2, that an appropriate range of skills is addressed over future examination series, that there is an appropriate level of structuring in questions for future written papers, and that future mark schemes allocate appropriate credit for references to candidates' own fieldwork
- ensure that future mark schemes reflect the requirements of questions accurately, and that level descriptors provide clear guidance to examiners on the application of indicative content.

For physics, Edexcel will:

- increase the duration of the written papers for units 6PH01 and 6PH02 to enable candidates better to demonstrate the extent of their knowledge, understanding and skills
- ensure that future written papers for units 6PH01 and 6PH02 make clear to candidates how the quality of their written communication will be assessed

- ensure that future mark schemes for units 6PH01 and 6PH02 reflect the wording of questions in the related written papers, are consistent in terms of the guidance provided to examiners, and provide clear guidance on how the quality of candidates' written communication should be assessed.

For Spanish, Edexcel will:

- ensure that future mark schemes for short written response questions for unit 6SP02 provide clear and detailed guidance to examiners on the allocation of marks.

For design and technology, OCR will:

- ensure that future mark schemes for the written paper component of unit F521 provide clear and detailed guidance to examiners on the allocation of marks.

For history A and B, OCR will:

- monitor the application of future mark schemes to ensure that they are performing effectively, revise the mark schemes to ensure appropriate progression between level descriptors, and amend the mark schemes for units F963/64 to clarify the requirements in relation to the interpretations element of AO2b.



## Other assessments

Candidates were required to complete one coursework unit for each of AQA English literature A and B, Edexcel physics, and OCR design and technology. Candidates were required to complete one speaking test for Edexcel Spanish and one design challenge for OCR design and technology.<sup>6</sup> The coursework units for AQA English literature A and B, and OCR design and technology were marked internally by the centre and moderated externally by the awarding organisation. The coursework unit for Edexcel physics was either marked internally by the centre and moderated externally by the awarding organisation or marked externally by the awarding organisation. The speaking test for Edexcel Spanish and the design challenge for OCR design and technology were marked externally by the awarding organisation.

### Summary of findings

Overall, the assessment materials set by the awarding organisations were clear and well-presented, and there was generally a suitable progression in demand from GCSE. Equally, the coursework tasks had the potential to elicit an appropriate range of levels of response from candidates, and, where relevant, optional routes tended to be comparable in their requirements. There were appropriate opportunities in most cases for candidates of different levels of ability to demonstrate, and be credited for, what they knew, understood and could do. Overall, the samples of candidates' work reviewed were in line with expectations, and, where relevant, were of a comparable standard across optional routes.

However, there were issues regarding some aspects of the assessments. They related primarily to task-setting, quality of marking criteria and mark schemes, and comparability of optional routes.

### Task-setting

In two instances, there was variation for the coursework units in relation to the requirements of the tasks set by different centres.

For AQA English literature A and B, the tasks that had been set by different centres for units LITA2 and LITB2 often were not comparably demanding.

For Edexcel physics, there was variation in the demand of the contexts selected by different centres for unit 6PH03.

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<sup>6</sup> Candidates completed the speaking test and the design challenge under examination conditions. The speaking test was based on a stimulus set by the awarding organisation, and the design challenge was based on a pre-released theme issued by the awarding organisation.

### **Quality of marking criteria and mark schemes**

In some instances, there were issues regarding the marking criteria or mark schemes for the assessments. These issues included their clarity, the extent to which they were conducive to being applied consistently by assessors and moderators, their level of demand, their potential to discriminate appropriately and the provision of relevant information to centres.

For Edexcel physics, some of the individual marking criteria for unit 6PH03 were not appropriately demanding and did not discriminate appropriately across the different performance levels of candidates. In some cases, the allocation of marks in the criteria was not based on candidates' knowledge, understanding and skills in terms of physics. In some cases, the allocation of only one mark to each of the individual marking criteria meant that they could not take enough account of the quality of candidates' answers. Along with the issue noted above relating to task-setting, this meant the sample of candidates' work reviewed was not in line with expectations as variation was evident in the standard at a given mark point.

For OCR design and technology, a large number of marks were allocated to section five of the marking criteria for unit F522. As a result, the marks for this section were not conducive to being applied consistently. Although this section was divided into three sub-sections at the moderator standardisation meeting, one section still contained a relatively large number of marks, and the revised version had not been provided to centres.

For OCR design and technology, examiners had been provided with a working version of the mark scheme for the unit F521 design challenge. (This was based on the marking criteria provided in the specification but presented in a more complex format.) Although the total marks in the sample of candidates' work reviewed were appropriate, there was some variation in how examiners had annotated the mark scheme, which suggested they did not have an entirely common understanding of its application.

### **Comparability of optional routes**

In the case of Edexcel physics, there had been some variation in the performance of candidates of similar levels of ability across the two assessment routes for unit 6PH03. This was addressed by the awarding organisation making a compensatory mark adjustment for the June 2009 examination series.

## Next steps

Ofqual now requires the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately. Although these action plans are currently at a preliminary stage, each awarding organisation has outlined a range of actions.

For English literature A and B, AQA will:

- provide guidance to centres for units LITA2 and LITB2 to ensure that the tasks they set are appropriately and comparably demanding.

For physics, Edexcel will:

- provide guidance to centres for unit 6PH03 to ensure that the tasks they set are appropriately and comparably demanding
- develop a formal process to address any future variation in the performance of candidates of similar levels of ability across the two assessment routes for unit 6PH03.

For design and technology, OCR will:

- revise the mark scheme for the unit F521 design challenge to provide clear and detailed guidance to examiners on the allocation of marks
- revise the marking criteria for unit F522 by dividing each of the three sub-sections for section five into three mark bands
- provide centres with the revised version of the marking criteria for unit F522.

## Awarding organisation meetings

As part of our 2009 scrutiny programme, Ofqual observed a large number of meetings held by awarding organisations in relation to the new GCE AS level qualifications. Twenty one meetings related to standardising examiners, four to standardising moderators and 13 to awarding grades.

Generally, the meetings observed were organised and managed effectively, and were conducted in line with the detailed requirements of the *GCSE, GCE and AEA Code of practice*. However, there were also some instances of non-compliance, which are detailed below.

### Standardising examiners

The written papers for AQA geography, Edexcel physics and Edexcel Spanish were marked online using the awarding organisations' established processes. The written papers for AQA English literature A and B, and for OCR history A and B were marked traditionally, as were the externally assessed coursework route for Edexcel physics, the speaking test for Edexcel Spanish and the design challenge for OCR design and technology.<sup>7</sup> All of the marking was completed by examiners who were subject experts, except for the Edexcel physics and Edexcel Spanish written papers, where some answers that would be relatively straightforward to consider were allocated to other types of marker.

For each specification, the examiners and, where relevant, the markers were standardised to ensure that they had a well-founded and common understanding of the requirements of the mark schemes or marking criteria, which they could then apply reliably to candidates' work. This process generally took place at face-to-face meetings, though AQA did also trial online standardisation for some units. The examiners and/or markers for each specification were trained using examples of candidates' work for which the marking had been agreed by senior examiners at previous meetings. The examiners and/or markers were required to mark a number of these examples to an agreed standard to qualify for live marking. Similar examples were then used to monitor their marking on an ongoing basis.

In most cases, these meetings followed the process required by the code of practice. There were useful briefings and generally effective processes for discussing mark schemes and/or marking criteria, as well as for considering candidates' work.

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<sup>7</sup> Some information regarding the development of online marking processes and their differences from traditional marking processes is available on the Ofqual website (<http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/110.aspx>).

However, for each awarding organisation, some instances of non-compliance with the code of practice were also noted. These instances included examiners not completing the required preparatory work, lack of reference to the assessment materials for the current examination series, consideration of only a relatively limited range of candidates' work and examiners' marking not being checked actively enough as part of the standardisation process. It did not appear that these issues would adversely affect the outcomes for learners.

### **Standardising moderators**

The coursework units for AQA English literature A and B and for OCR design and technology were marked by internal assessors in centres, with a sample of candidates' work then moderated by the awarding organisation in each case to ensure that it was in line with agreed standards. This approach was also adopted for Edexcel physics for the internally assessed coursework route.

The moderators for each specification were standardised to ensure that they had a well-founded and common understanding of the requirements of the marking criteria, which they could then apply reliably to candidates' work. This process took place at face-to-face meetings and was along similar lines to the process for standardising examiners and markers.<sup>8</sup>

These meetings followed the process required by the code of practice. There were useful briefings and generally effective processes for discussing marking criteria, as well as for considering candidates' work.

### **Awarding grades**

When candidates' work had been marked or, where relevant, moderated, an awarding committee met for each specification to recommend grade boundaries for each unit and to consider the resultant grade outcomes for the specification as a whole. These awarding committees comprised the chair of examiners, the chief examiner, the principal examiner for each unit and, where relevant, the principal moderator for each unit.

Each awarding committee reviewed a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence, such as examples of candidates' work and various forms of statistical information. The members then used their collective professional judgement to recommend marks for the key grade boundaries for each unit; for AS level qualifications these are the A/B and E/U grade boundaries. The remaining grade boundaries for each unit were

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<sup>8</sup> In each case, there were also arrangements in place for providing instructions and guidance to centres and internal assessors, as well as for authenticating and/or supervising candidates' work.

calculated mathematically from the judgemental recommendations that had been made.

In most cases, these meetings followed the process required by the code of practice. Furthermore, each awarding organisation had carried out a range of statistical modelling before the meetings with a view to ensuring that standards from previous specifications were maintained in the new specifications.

However, for AQA and OCR, some instances of non-compliance with the code of practice were also noted. These instances included limited availability of candidates' work, limited circulation of technical and statistical information, judgemental grade boundaries not being considered in the sequence required, and the full awarding process not being followed for all of the units in a specification. It did not appear that these issues would adversely affect the outcomes for learners.

### **Next steps**

Ofqual now requires the awarding organisations to agree appropriate post-scrutiny action plans to address these issues for future examination series. Ofqual will monitor the implementation of these action plans to ensure that the issues have been addressed appropriately.

## **Maintaining grading standards**

The introduction of new specifications and the associated changes to assessment structures presents challenges in ensuring that grading standards are maintained appropriately over time. Accordingly, Ofqual and the regulators for Wales and Northern Ireland worked with the awarding organisations to maintain standards in the new GCE AS level qualifications, which were awarded for the first time in 2009.

In monitoring the new qualifications, Ofqual aimed to ensure that standards were consistent with those from the previous specifications so that, all things being equal, candidates with the same knowledge, understanding and skills would achieve the same grade, regardless of which specification they had entered.

In addition to our detailed monitoring of individual qualifications as part of the scrutiny programme, Ofqual agreed with the awarding organisations a comprehensive monitoring process. This meant we could be confident that candidates taking any of the new specifications were not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged in relation to those taking the previous specifications.

A key aspect of this monitoring process was agreeing mechanisms with the awarding organisations by which they would provide to the regulators, and exchange between themselves, data relating to any differences in grading outcomes from those they had expected. This process provided an early indication of possible issues with the anticipated outcomes, which might unfairly advantage or disadvantage candidates.

Ofqual reviewed the outcomes of the new AS units and the first AS level results before they were published, and we were satisfied that consistent standards had been applied and that candidates could have confidence that their results in 2009 were in line with results from 2008.

## **Further work**

In 2010, the first awards of the new GCE A level qualifications will be made, including the first awards of the A\* grade at A level.

Ofqual will continue our detailed monitoring of the qualifications we monitored for AS level in 2009: design and technology, English literature, geography, history, physics and Spanish. We will publish our findings from this work in 2011.

Ofqual will also continue to work with the awarding organisations to review the outcomes of the new A2 units and the first A level results, in advance of their publication.

## Appendix A: Schemes of assessment

The schemes of assessment for each of the specifications considered as part of the 2009 scrutiny programme are summarised below.

### AQA GCE AS level English literature A (1741)

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration (hours)	Marks	Weighting (% of AS)
1	LTA1	Texts in context	Written paper	2	90	60
2	LITA2	Creative study	Coursework	N/A	60	40

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is available in the January and June examination series. Unit LTA1 is externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit LITA2 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

For unit LTA1, there are three optional components of which candidates must complete one:

- LTA1A: *Victorian literature*
- LTA1B: *World War One literature*
- LTA1C: *The struggle for identity in modern literature.*

In each case, the written paper is open book, and there are four set texts for study: one poetry text and three texts covering all three literary forms (prose, poetry and drama) as part of wider reading. There are two sections:

- section A (45 marks) requires candidates to analyse an unseen extract and relate it to the texts considered as part of their wider reading
- section B (45 marks) requires candidates to consider their selected set poetry text.

Candidates respond to one question from each section.

For unit LITA2, there is a minimum of two set texts for study (both taken from one of the genres listed for unit LTA1; one being a prose text and one a drama text).

Candidates must complete two tasks, one on each text, comprising 2,000 to 2,500 words.



**AQA GCE AS level English literature B (1746)**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Assessment type</b>	<b>Duration (hours)</b>	<b>Marks</b>	<b>Weighting (% of AS)</b>
1	LITB1	Aspects of narrative	Written paper	2	84	60
2	LITB2	Dramatic genres	Coursework	N/A	60	40

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is available in the January and June examination series. Unit LITB1 is externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit LITB2 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

For unit LITB1, the written paper is open book, and there are four set texts for study: two prose texts (at least one written post-1990) and two poetry texts (written 1800-1945). There are two sections:

- section A (42 marks) requires candidates to consider one of their selected set texts
- section B (42 marks) requires candidates to consider their three other selected set texts.

Candidates respond to one question from each section.

For unit LITB2, there is a minimum of two set texts for study (both within the dramatic genre of tragedy; at least one being a Shakespeare text).

Candidates must complete two tasks, one on the Shakespeare text and one on at least one other text, each comprising 1,200 to 1,500 words.

**AQA GCE AS level geography (1031)**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Assessment type</b>	<b>Duration (hours)</b>	<b>Marks</b>	<b>Weighting (% of AS)</b>
1	GEOG1	Physical and human geography	Written paper	2	120	70
2	GEOG2	Geographical skills	Written paper	1	50	30

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is normally available in the January and June examination series. However, for this first year of assessment, unit GEOG1 was not available in the January examination series. Both units are externally marked by the awarding organisation.

For unit GEOG1, candidates must respond to one core question on each of physical and human geography, as well as one optional question on each of these. The compulsory topic for physical geography is *Rivers, floods and management*, and the optional topics are *Cold environments*, *Coastal environments* and *Hot desert environments and their margins*. The compulsory topic for human geography is *Population change*, and the optional topics are *Food supply issues*, *Energy issues* and *Health issues*.

The questions require candidates to produce short and extended answers.

For unit GEOG2, candidates must respond to one question that addresses one of the two compulsory core sections for physical and human geography, as well as one question that addresses their fieldwork and investigative research skills.

**Edexcel GCE AS level physics (8PH01)**

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration	Marks	Weighting (% of AS)
1	6PH01	Physics on the go	Written paper	1 hour 20 minutes	80	40
2	6PH02	Physics at work	Written paper	1 hour 20 minutes	80	40
3	6PH03	Exploring physics	Coursework	N/A	40	20

Candidates must complete each of the units. Units 6PH01 and 6PH02 are available in the January and June examination series; unit 6PH03 is only available in the June examination series. Units 6PH01 and 6PH02 are externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit 6PH03 may be either externally marked by the awarding organisation or internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

Units 6PH01 and 6PH02 both have two sections:

- section A (10 marks) requires candidates to respond to multiple-choice questions
- section B (70 marks) requires candidates to produce short and extended answers to questions.

Unit 6PH01 addresses *Mechanics* and *Materials*; unit 6PH02 addresses *Waves*, *Electricity* and the *Nature of light*.

For unit 6PH03, candidates must complete an experiment that relates to either a physics-based visit or a case study of an application of physics.

Candidates must produce a report about their visit or case study, comprising 500 to 600 words. The related experiment must be conducted under supervised conditions.

**Edexcel GCE AS level Spanish (8SP01)**

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration	Marks	Weighting (% of AS)
1	6SP01	Spoken expression and response in Spanish	Speaking test	8-10 minutes	50	30
2	6SP02	Understanding and written response in Spanish	Written paper	2 hours 30 minutes	70	70

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is normally available in the January and June examination series. However, for this first year of assessment, unit 6SP02 was not available in the January examination series. Both units are externally marked by the awarding organisation.

Unit 6SP01 has two sections:

- section A requires candidates to respond to four questions set by the awarding organisation about a stimulus relating to the candidate's selected general topic area
- section B requires the teacher/examiner to engage the candidate in a discussion that is related to the same general topic area and its linked sub-topics but moves away from the main focus of the stimulus.

Marks are allocated for the test as a whole, rather than for each individual section. The general topic areas are *Youth culture and concerns*, *Lifestyle: health and fitness*, *The world around us: travel, tourism, environmental issues and the Spanish-speaking world* and *Education and employment*.

Unit 6SP02 has three sections:

- section A (20 marks) requires candidates to listen to a range of authentic, recorded Spanish-language material and to retrieve and convey information given in the recording by responding to a range of Spanish-language questions
- section B (20 marks) requires candidates to read authentic Spanish-language printed materials and to retrieve and convey information by responding to a range of mainly Spanish-language test types

- section C (30 marks) requires candidates to write 200 to 220 words in Spanish, in the form of a letter, report or article, based on a short, printed Spanish-language stimulus.

**OCR GCE AS level design and technology: product design (H053)**

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration (hours)	Marks	Weighting (% of AS)
1	F521	Advanced innovation challenge	Design challenge	7	80	40
2	F522	Product study	Coursework	30	120	60

Candidates must complete both of the units. Each unit is normally available in the January and June examination series. However, for this first year of assessment, neither unit was available in the January examination series. Unit F521 is externally marked by the awarding organisation; unit F522 is internally marked by the centre and externally moderated by the awarding organisation.

For unit F521, the design challenge is based on a pre-released theme. There are three sessions, each completed under examination conditions:

- session 1 (3 hours / 30 marks) requires candidates to produce a specification and design brief, with their 'job bag' as inspiration, using annotated sketches, notes and models to describe their ideas and designs
- session 2 (3 hours / 30 marks) requires candidates to model their selected design, record thoughts and further ideas in a workbook, and evaluate their final design and model against their original specification
- session 3 (1 hour / 20 marks) is a written paper, comprising two compulsory questions, which requires candidates to reflect on the product designed in the first two sessions from a design, marketing or manufacturing perspective.

For unit F522, candidates are required to complete product analysis and product development, prototype modelling and testing. The emphasis is on the identification of opportunities for the further development or improvement of an existing product.

**OCR GCE AS level history A (H106)**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Assessment type</b>	<b>Duration</b>	<b>Marks</b>	<b>Weighting (% of AS)</b>
1	F961	British history period studies	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	100	50
	F962	European and world history period studies	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	100	50
2	F963	British history enquiries	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	100	50
	F964	European and world history enquiries	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	100	50

Candidates must complete either units F961 and F964 or units F962 and F963. Each unit is available in the January and June examination series. Both units are externally marked by the awarding organisation.

For each unit, there are two optional components, of which candidates must complete one. In each case, one component relates to a medieval and early modern period, and the other relates to a modern period.

For units F961 and F962, there are between six and 10 optional study topics for each component. The written paper for each component includes three essay questions for each study topic. Candidates are required to respond to two questions (each worth 50 marks). These questions may address the same study topic or two different study topics.

For units F963 and F964, there are between two and five optional study topics for each component. The written paper for each component includes one two-part, document-study question for each study topic, and each of these questions includes four or five sources. Candidates are required to respond to one question. Each question is in two parts:

- part (a) (30 marks) requires candidates to compare two sources
- part (b) (70 marks) requires candidates to test an assertion against all of the sources and their own knowledge.

**OCR GCE AS level history B (H108)**

Unit	Code	Title	Assessment type	Duration	Marks	Weighting (% of AS)
1	F981	Historical explanation – British history	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	50	50
	F982	Historical explanation – Non-British history	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	50	50
2	F983	Using historical evidence – British history	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	50	50
	F984	Using historical evidence – Non-British history	Written paper	1 hour 30 minutes	50	50

Candidates must complete either units F981 and F984 or units F982 and F983. Each unit is available in the January and June examination series. Both units are externally marked by the awarding organisation.

For each unit, there are four optional topics: one medieval, one early modern and two modern (one predominantly 19th century and one 20th century).

For units F981 and F982, each written paper includes two essay questions for each optional topic. Candidates are required to respond to one question (worth 50 marks). Each question is in two parts; two out of three types of historical explanation are addressed by each question. These types are explaining events, explaining ideas, attitudes and beliefs, and explaining actions.

For units F983 and F984, each written paper includes one two-part question for each optional topic, and each of these questions includes between five and seven sources. Candidates are required to respond to one question. Each question is in two parts:

- part (a) (35 marks) requires candidates to use the sources and their own knowledge to evaluate, and possibly amend, an interpretation
- part (b) (15 marks) requires candidates to analyse the sources for their usefulness and problems.

## **Appendix B: GCE AS and A level qualification criteria**

The revised *GCE AS and A level qualification criteria* (February 2007), which relate to the specifications considered as part of the 2009 scrutiny programme, are provided below.





Qualifications and  
Curriculum Authority



Llywodraeth Cynulliad Cymru  
Welsh Assembly Government



*Rewarding Learning*

# **GCE AS and A level qualification criteria**

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February 2007

QCA/06/2866

This is an extract (pages 28–30) from the ‘General Certificates of Education (GCEs)’ section of *The statutory regulation of external qualifications* (QCA/04/1293). Changes to the previous criteria are indicated in bold.

### **Content of General Certificates of Education (GCEs)**

**85** The titles of GCEs must:

- a) correspond to the titles used in the relevant subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities, where such criteria exist
- b) be sufficiently broad to cover different specifications in the same subject area, if relevant subject criteria are not published by the regulatory authorities.

**86** The subject matter of GCEs must:

- a) meet the GCE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for the subject title, where they exist
- b) compare in substance and range to the GCE subject criteria published by the regulatory authorities for other subjects, if relevant subject criteria do not exist
- c) for AS qualifications:
  - i) provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the first half of a full A level course of study
  - ii) enable candidates to be assessed normally, by means of **two** assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level
  - iii) include assessment units that will normally be weighted within the range of **15–35** per cent of the full A level. **Weightings outside this range may be agreed where appropriate with the regulatory authorities**
  - iv) for double-award specifications, enable candidates to be assessed normally by means of **four** assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level double award
- d) for A2 assessments that will be combined with AS assessments to lead to the award of a full A level:
  - i) provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the second half of a full A level course of study
  - ii) enable candidates to be assessed normally, by means of **two** assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level
  - iii) include assessment units that will normally be weighted within the range of **15–35** per cent of the full A level. **Weightings outside this range may be agreed where appropriate with the regulatory authorities**
  - iv) for double-award specifications, enable candidates to be assessed normally by means of four assessment units, which, taken together, will have a total weight of 50 per cent of the A level double award
- e) include optional units **only** if these:
  - i) demand additional skills, knowledge and/or understanding
  - ii) extend the core content within a specialist context and/or introduce links to another subject area

f) identify opportunities to generate evidence for the assessment of the nationally specified wider key skills of improving own learning and performance, problem solving, and working with others.

### Assessment in GCEs

**87** The assessment arrangements in GCEs must:

a) offer candidates the opportunity to be assessed either (in stages) during the course or at the end of the course

b) include an explanation of the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment units

**c) normally include only one component of assessment (internal assessment may involve more than task, while external assessment may, for example, involve listening, reading and writing aspects. In each case, there will be one awarding process per unit)**

**d) ensure that internal assessment is used only where it is the soundest method of assessing specific skills within the assessment objectives, and agree it with the regulatory authorities on a subject-by-subject basis**

**e) ensure that, where internal assessment is included, specifications make clear how reliability and fairness are to be secured, by setting out requirements that ensure the robustness of each stage of the internal assessment, ie:**

- **setting of tasks**
- **extent of supervision in carrying out of tasks**
- **conditions under which assessment takes place**
- **marking of the assessment and internal standardising procedures**
- **any moderation process**

**f) not exceed a maximum examining time for external assessments of three hours at AS and four hours at A2, unless otherwise agreed in the subject criteria**

g) show the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective (or group of assessment objectives) and to each assessment unit

h) show which assessment objectives will include the assessment of written communication

i) include sufficient synoptic assessment at A2 to test the candidates' understanding of the connections between the different elements of the subject **and their holistic understanding of the subject**

**j) include A2 assessments that provide appropriate demand through**

- **the use of a variety of stems in questions**
- **ensuring connectivity between sections of questions**
- **requiring extended writing in all subjects, except where agreed with the regulatory authorities as inappropriate**
- **using a wide range of question type to address different skills**
- **including synoptic assessment**

- k) be comparable for all candidates, even where there are optional assessment units or optional examination questions
- l) where candidates are required to produce written material in English, Welsh and Irish (Gaeilge), require candidates to:
  - i) ensure that text is legible and that spelling, punctuation and grammar are accurate so that meaning is clear
  - ii) select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and to complex subject matter
  - iii) organise information clearly and coherently, using specialist vocabulary when appropriate
- m) comply with subject criteria relating to the balance between external and internal assessment, including synoptic assessment where such criteria exist
- n) allow results of an assessment unit with the best result counting towards the qualification
- o) stipulate that results for a unit have a shelf-life limited only by the shelf-life of the relevant specification.

### **Reporting of GCEs**

**88** The qualification must specify arrangements for grading and reporting of GCEs so that:

- a) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at AS level is reported on a five-grade scale from A to E, where A is the highest
- b) attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at A level is reported on a six-grade scale from A\* to E, where A\* is the highest
- c) attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at AS or A level is reported as unclassified or U
- c) the grades awarded match performance descriptions published by the regulatory authorities, if available
- d) if relevant performance descriptions published by the regulatory authorities are not available, the grades awarded match performance descriptions for AS and A2 levels at the grade boundaries A/B and E/U submitted by the awarding body and approved by the regulatory authorities.

**89** AS double award is reported on the following grading scale: AA, AB, BB, BC, CC, CD, DD, DE, EE.

**90** A level double award is reported on the following grading scale: A\*A\*, A\*A, AA, AB, BB, BC, CC, CD, DD, DE, EE.

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Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation  
Spring Place  
Coventry Business Park  
Herald Avenue  
Coventry CV5 6UB

Telephone 0300 303 3344  
Textphone 0300 303 3345  
Helpline 0300 303 3346

[www.ofqual.gov.uk](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk)