

Consultation Summary Paper

Ofqual Consultation on Setting the Grade Standards of the new GCSEs in England

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A brief introduction to Pearson

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A summary of the consultation

In 2013, as part of the reformed GCSE consultation, Ofqual outlined the requirement to review the GCSE grading system. Ofqual define standards in three dimensions: *content standard* - what a student should know and do; *assessment standard* - the level of demand of the assessment, and *performance standard* - the standard of performance required for the award of a particular grade. This consultation focuses on the performance standard and looks at the detail of the new grading system. It consults on the general principles and methodology used to set standards in the first year and maintain them in subsequent years. Following the general GCSE consultation Ofqual defined the new grading scale as 9-1, with grade 9 being the highest.

A summary of the Pearson response

The technical implications of the proposals will require detailed consideration across awarding organisations. We have put forward some key recommendations to supplement the proposals.

- We broadly agree with all but one of the proposals - grade 9 should not be awarded as half the current proportion of students that achieve A*. Firstly, because there are some subjects with very few students achieving an A* and secondly, it is difficult to justify a different awarding approach for one grade than the other 8. We recommend splitting the two grades 8 and 9 as equidistant either in mark width or proportions from each other and grade point 7.
- Setting standards is more complex than the awarding of grades. Rewarding the same proportion of students at equivalent grades on the current qualifications may mean student responses do not reflect the expected performance standards in the live assessments in the first years. This message needs to be communicated with stakeholders so as not to undermine the validity of the assessment.
- It is essential that learners in the transition years are not unfairly penalised by the changes to the qualifications, that stakeholders can make meaningful links between the grades on the legacy and new qualifications, and that the new grading system allows for further differentiation at both the middle and top end of the grading scale.
- International Standards should be built into the assessment design to have a meaningful impact in linking performance. The metrics outlined for linking international standards to the GCSE require detailed technical consideration. International jurisdiction education systems, qualification structures and age of national assessments will all have an impact on performance on PISA tests which themselves are very different in construct from the GCSEs.
- The link between the national reference test and subjects other than English and Maths requires detailed consideration. It would be possible to use the reference test to set grade distributions for English and Maths, generate ability estimates for every student then use this to construct a prediction matrix for performance in other subjects – however this would require inter-board detailed research to pursue this approach.
- The new awarding system must be transparent and understood by all stakeholders.