

Consultation Summary Paper

Pearson response to the NIACE Call for Evidence to ensure the effective implementation of new GCSEs in maths and English

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Opened 17/09/2014, closed 30/09/2014, Pearson lead: Peter Lee

A brief introduction to Pearson

Pearson is the world's leading learning company. Our education business combines 150 years of experience in publishing with the latest learning technology and online support. We are also part of the wider Pearson family which includes Penguin, Dorling Kindersley and the Financial Times. We provide education and assessment services in more than 70 countries. Our qualifications, courses and resources are available in print, online and through multi-lingual packages, helping people learn whatever, wherever and however they choose.

A summary of the consultation

BIS and DfE commissioned NIACE, in partnership with NRDC (National Research and Development Centre for adult literacy and numeracy) to lead a call for evidence to ensure the effective implementation of the English and maths GCSEs. In particular, BIS and DfE wanted to hear from a range of providers about what systems need to be in place to support young adults, adult learners, trainees and apprentices to achieve GCSE maths and English.

A summary of the Pearson response

- Learners are only likely to effectively re-engage with GCSE if they have a clear understanding of why they are required to retake the qualification(s).
- Although many providers view contextualising English and maths in vocational qualifications as a useful way of demonstrating their relevance, we believe there is a case to be made for having these subjects delivered separately by specialists.
- Online diagnostics can be invaluable in helping teaching staff with limited time ascertain the proficiency of students, but these tools need to be reliable, quality assured, and mediated by teachers.
- Information on students' prior achievement in English and maths should be made available to their post-16 providers wherever possible, ideally breaking down performance across different areas.
- Functional Skills was not designed as a 'stepping stone' to GCSE, and our research suggests it may not perform effectively in this role.
- Post-16 providers face an issue not only with the potentially low number of contact hours they will have with learners but also, for the time being, in deciding whether to teach the current or new GCSEs. The use of online learning may help reduce issues associated with a lack of contact time.
- It is commonly accepted that the new GCSEs will be more challenging than the current versions. This presents a potentially demoralising challenge to learners who have previously been unsuccessful in gaining a good GCSE grade. This makes it all the more important that their proficiency and prior attainment are clear to post-16 providers, and that they subsequently work towards suitable qualifications.
- Teaching staff are likely to require professional development to help them deliver the less 'functional' aspects of GCSE.
- A number of training providers we spoke to were not familiar with the policy changes around GCSE.