

Pearson response to the DfE consultation on GCSE and A level reform: content for teaching from 2017

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I am responding on behalf of an organisation**What is the name of your organisation?**

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Description

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Please tick if you want us to keep your response confidential

N/A

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 Pearson response

Pearson welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation on proposed content for reformed GCSEs and A levels. We also welcome the opportunities that we as an awarding organisation have been afforded to feed in to the process of shaping these content criteria, drawing on our extensive research with Higher Education Institutions, stakeholder groups, teachers and learners.

The qualifications featured in this consultation fall into two groups:

- GCSE and A level qualifications where the awarding organisations have worked closely on the drafting throughout 2016, in collaboration with the DfE, Ofqual and groups of stakeholders / HEIs.
- GCE design and technology, where awarding organisations have been heavily involved, but there has been a stronger steer from DfE and stakeholders as to the proposed direction of travel.

As our involvement in drafting the former set of content was extensive, we are supportive of the proposed requirements as they currently stand and are not proposing further changes.

With regard to GCE design and technology, we are generally supportive of the content requirements and agree that they are broadly appropriate in light of the issues raised by stakeholders. However, there are some specific aspects where we have recommended changes based on our research evidence. There are also some areas where further clarification will be needed. Our concerns and subsequent recommendations are detailed in Section 2 below.

As we do not offer GCSE qualifications in economics, engineering, geology or engineering, nor GCE qualifications in environmental science, history of art or philosophy, we are not best placed to comment on the proposed subject content in those areas. The comments below do not pertain to those subjects.

Detailed response: section 1 - GCSE

Section 1 asks respondents to consider whether the revised GCSE content is appropriate, based on the level of challenge and progression opportunities afforded.

Pearson teams were heavily involved in the drafting of the proposed content requirements for **GCSE astronomy, business and psychology**. We worked collaboratively alongside colleagues at AQA, OCR and Eduqas (with the exception of astronomy where we are sole provider), as well as DfE and Ofqual colleagues, to listen to the views of stakeholder groups and a range of HEI representatives to establish new content expectations for these subjects. As well as working with stakeholders convened by the Department, we also have a detailed base of evidence of our own to draw on, including additional stakeholder engagement, plus data and qualitative analysis relating to our existing qualifications. As such, we believe that the proposed subject content for these three GCSE qualifications is appropriate.

We would add one further note to this: the content drafting process has inevitably required a degree of compromise. It has involved finding an appropriate balance between ensuring that the content provides the best possible progression, ensuring that the skills, knowledge and understanding represented are the right ones for the subject in the eyes of stakeholders, and ensuring that we can assess these validly and reliably over the life of the qualification. In particular, content and assessment decisions are often inextricably interlinked, and where the proportion of non-examined assessment has been reduced, this has often had an impact on the choices made about content. We believe these criteria balance these different drivers as best they can. We do however look forward to receiving feedback and refinement from the broadest range of stakeholders through this consultation process.

Detailed response: section 2 – A level

Section 2 asks respondents to consider whether the revised GCE content is appropriate, namely whether the content reflects what students need to know in order to progress to undergraduate study.

A Pearson team led on the drafting of the proposed content requirements for **GCE music technology** (Pearson is sole provider). As per the response to section 1, we worked with DfE and Ofqual colleagues, stakeholder groups, schools, colleges and HEI representatives to establish new content expectations for these subjects, as well as drawing on our own evidence base of stakeholder input and qualitative data. As such – notwithstanding the caveats above regarding the need to find the most balanced compromise – we believe the proposed subject content for this qualification is appropriate, though we do look forward to receiving feedback and refinement through this process.

In the case of **GCE design and technology**, we have worked to support the Department in their drafting, but have not taken a lead role. As such, we would like to take this opportunity to make some further recommendations.

We support the proposal to provide design and technology students with a greater breadth of study through the core technical knowledge and understanding, and the core design and making principles. We also support allowing students to specialise and develop a greater depth of understanding through the additional specialist knowledge.

Section 11 of the content proposes three endorsed design and technology titles of:

- design and technology (product design)
- design and technology (fashion design and development)
- design and technology (engineering).

Our research with teachers and stakeholders has indicated that there is some confusion concerning the title of 'Fashion design and development', namely the concern that calling this fashion rather than 'Textiles' will restrict students to designing clothes. We recommended that this is renamed 'Textiles design and development' to ensure that candidates are not restricted, or that the definition is amended to remove the word clothing, i.e. to read 'design, development and realisation of products for the fashion and textiles industries'.

As a result of our research, we believe further clarification is required in the subject content as to whether these three suggested specification titles are indeed the only titles that boards will be permitted to develop. Currently several boards offer specifications that allow further specialisation e.g. our own D&T Product Design: Graphics and D&T Product Design: Resistant Materials courses. We feel greater clarity may be needed around this point, either within the criteria or the conditions and guidance to ensure comparability between specifications.

Our research with teaching specialists and our examining teams has raised some concerns about the overlap between the two titles of product design and fashion. The additional specialist knowledge for product design requires students have knowledge and understanding of the working characteristics of textiles and this overlaps with the additional specialist knowledge within fashion. The definition for product design ('domestic and commercial products that meet the needs and wants of users and clients') can also be applied to the fashion title. We would suggest that the definitions are reviewed to ensure these two titles are not interchangeable and to ensure comparability between specifications.

We welcome the inclusion of the additional specialist knowledge within the subject content. However, our research has shown that there is some concern about the comparability of the specialist knowledge within the three titles. In particular, at A level the additional knowledge appears greater for engineering than for fashion. We recommend a further review of the additional content for each title to either add or remove content to ensure all three are comparable.

The revised content also contains some of the specific rules around the NEA tasks. Given that these pertain to the assessment arrangements for the qualification, we feel these would be best placed in Ofqual's subject conditions and guidance, to prevent overlap or confusion. Examples of this are:

- Section 9: AS specification must require students to undertake at least three discrete practical activities that between them enable their skills, knowledge and understanding of design and technology to be demonstrated
- Section 10: At A level there is a minimum expectation that students undertake a substantial design, make and evaluate project that exemplifies their skills, knowledge and understanding of design and technology.

We support the addition and clarity of the role of mathematics and science within design and technology (displayed in appendix 1). However, our research with centres indicates that the table in appendix 1 can cause some confusion, as it is not clear if specifications would have to include the left hand side of the table (scientific/mathematical knowledge and skills requirements) or if this provides the context for the right hand side of the table (potential design and technology applications) which would need to be included in specifications. To add clarity we would suggest that the heading of the appropriate column is changed to 'AS and A level specifications in design and technology must require students to demonstrate:'.