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Pocket Watch – Completing the GCSE/A level reform programme

Introduction

This week Ofqual published its proposals for what should happen to the final sweep of GCSEs and A levels, those in other words not already lined up for revision under previous announcements. Some will be re-developed ready for introduction in the final round of implementation in 2017, a task Ofqual is calling on Awarding Organisations (AOs) to undertake. Others may go because they duplicate a revised subject. Given that some of these qualifications under threat have a loyal following and often help meet a particular need, this may require some difficult decisions but the Government is keen to see a rationalised and re-focused set of qualifications fully in place over the next three years.

What's Ofqual proposing?

Three things.

1. The development by AOs of appropriate core content for the remaining subjects. Currently this includes 20 GCSEs including ICT and Media Studies and 27 AS/A levels including those old favourites General Studies and Media Studies. Core content is defined as *'the minimum knowledge, skills or abilities to be developed and learning outcomes expected from a course'* and it's this core content that will be used to help determine which of these remaining qualifications will be approved or not. In making that judgement Ofqual will apply five tests: definition of purpose; a comparable level of demand; validity of assessment (*"we expect assessment to be mainly by exam ;"*) ability to align to the new 9-1 grading scale; and distinctiveness of content. The aim is for these remaining subjects to be ready for first teaching from 2017
2. The removal of a number of duplicate subjects. The precise wording is *"similar or overlapping subjects that are unlikely to meet our standards requirements,"* the issue therefore being partly overlap but partly also robustness. At present 14 GCSEs and 14 AS/A levels are included in these listings. Some such as GCSE Manufacturing and A level Science in Society have very low entry numbers and presumably would not be greatly missed and others such as GCSE Performing Arts and A level Applied Business have alternative qualifications under development which may ameliorate any concerns. Some however like GCSE Home Economics and A level Film Studies may be more controversial given they recruit strongly, serve important markets and their proposed alternatives may not always be deemed suitable. Ofqual is asking for views as to whether any of these subjects should stay but otherwise is suggesting they should be awarded for the last time in 2018
3. A schedule for the completion of the reform programme. The aim is to have a fully reformed and tidied up system in place by 2017/18. With three years of phased implementation ahead, things may still appear bumpy but at least the flight path is now clear

What happens next?

Consultation on these proposals closes on 30 July and Ofqual will make a further announcement in the autumn.



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