

Consultation Summary Paper

Ofqual Consultation on the Assessment of Practical Work in GCSE Science

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Opened 10/12/2014, closed 04/02/15, Pearson lead: Kathryn Booth

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/assessing-practical-work-in-gcse-science>

A brief introduction to Pearson

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A summary of the consultation

The consultation sought views on a proposed model for practical assessment:

- 15% of marks within written exams will draw on knowledge and understanding of practicals.
- Awarding organisations (AOs) will use a list of techniques/apparatus to build core practicals into their specification (at least 8 for separate science and 16 for combined science).
- Schools will record practical work and confirm to their AO that students have completed.
- Students will keep records of the practical work they have completed (to be made available to the AO on request). There will be no practical competency measure as there is at A level.
- Revised assessment objectives will take account of this new weighting for practical assessment. Revised assessment objectives will be the same at each tier.
- There should be no less than 15% of the total marks for demonstration of mathematical skills and this should be across science GCSEs.

A summary of the Pearson response

Pearson is broadly in support of the proposals, but had some suggestions for refinement. We:

- Agree that the removal of coursework and the addition of questions in the examinations frees schools up to carry out a wide range of practicals that enhance teaching and learning.
- Believe the key to the success of the approach is to ensure questions in assessments critically differentiate and advantage candidates with a rich experience of practical work.
- Agree 15% weighting of practical skills is commensurate with the approach taken at A level.
- Suggest an increase in the number of minimum specified core practicals. The current minimum is not conducive to integrating practical into the teaching and learning. We suggest an increase from 8 to 12 (and 16 to 24 in Combined Science).
- Disagree with proposals for records to be made available to AOs. This will not encourage centres to do practical work, rather proposals to include practical skills in examinations should ensure the requirements are fulfilled.
- Agree with the proposal not to have a practical competency measure. It would be highly unmanageable for many centres to assess each student directly and we have reservations about the usefulness of such a measure at GCSE.
- With some reservations about specific wording, believe the overall aims of the assessment objectives are appropriate. We propose a slight shift in emphasis for some of the assessment objectives. We agree the assessment objective weightings should be the same at each tier.
- Agree a 15% requirement of mathematical skills would be appropriate, on the assumption that all calculations (and not just calculations at a defined level) would be included. We propose the % requirement of mathematical skills should not apply to each of the science GCSE subjects, but rather as an average across the four.