

Consultation on final legacy entries to GCSEs, AS and A Levels

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

- 1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents more than 18,000 heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of maintained and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL has members in more than 90 per cent of secondary schools and colleges of all types, responsible for the education of more than four million young people. This places the association in a unique position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of secondary schools and of colleges.
- 2 ASCL welcomes this consultation on final legacy entries to GCSEs, AS and A levels as there are a variety of reasons why the opportunities for resits presented in this consultation will be in the best interests of the pupils.
- 3 ASCL strongly agrees that students taking AS and A levels should have at least one opportunity to re-sit their examinations in the specification for which they studied. ASCL encounters frequent examples whereby it is undoubtedly in students' best interests to resit their AS or A Level due to personal circumstances; for example injury, sickness, family circumstances and future progression pathways.
- 4 Clearly, students should be able to resit any AS or A level units they have previously taken including controlled assessment; this is a key time in a young person's life and we support all opportunities for pupils to secure the best possible grades they can to enable them to progress onto appropriate pathways of their choice. The two years when most students study for these examinations are very formative; they learn from mistakes, failures and successes and our education system needs to recognise and support this. ASCL supports the proposal of the resit opportunities occurring at the same time as in other years in order to place the students in the same position as those in previous years.
- 5 ASCL strongly supports the proposal for an additional resit opportunity for legacy GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics (including the linked pair) in summer 2017.
- 6 We would like to strongly recommend that students are allowed more than one opportunity to re-sit English GCSEs (including Language and Literature) once the reformed GCSE exams begin. For those students joining post-16 institutions in September following a syllabus they may not have covered at GCSE, the November resit opportunity is too soon to allow adequate preparation. These key qualifications are vital for a student's progression and places on courses can be dependent on securing particular grades in English and maths, so students should have every opportunity to secure the best possible grade.
- 7 If the summer resit is unavailable and students do not pass in November, then is then insufficient time to prepare adequately to resit the reformed GCSE with different content requirements and different assessment methodology in just over a term's time.

Many institutions currently offer the resit over a year and it is inappropriate to disadvantage these students by restricting a resit to November.

- 8 School and college leaders are understandably concerned about the impact of a single resit opportunity in November on the most vulnerable students. Their life chances could be significantly harmed if they do not have the opportunity available in all earlier years to resit essentially the same specification after twelve months. Students with volatile personal lives and home environments often need to wait until the 'right time' to focus on examinations, and when this happens, are able to succeed.
- 9 There should therefore be the opportunity for students who have sat a legacy GCSE, whatever the subject, to be able to resit it at a later date. Students mature at different ages, students learn from mistakes made, and not all students 'get it right first time'. We should have a facility within our system open to those who have previously sat the exam once, to try to improve on their performance to enhance their future prospects and life changes. It is very likely that there may be personal reasons and circumstances which mean that students did not do as well as they could at the initial sitting. National resit numbers for subjects other than maths and English are low and there are usually understandable and justifiable reasons why a student needs to resit a particular GCSE. The totality of a students' grades are used for progression purposes and students should have the opportunity to do as well as possible during this period of transition; their needs should come before the inconvenience to awarding organisations in offering this opportunity.
- 10 ASCL supports regulations to ensure awarding organisations comply with Ofqual's requirements once the accreditation for a qualification ceases. It is important that there is consistency across awarding organisations in this respect to safeguard the interests of students during these transitional arrangements.

With reference to your specific questions

Question 1: To what extent do you agree or disagree that students taking AS and A levels should have at least one opportunity to re-sit their exams in the specification for which they studied?

- 11 Strongly agree, please see paragraph 3 above.

Question 2: To what extent do you agree or disagree that students re-sitting their AS and A levels in qualifications that have ceased to be accredited should be able to resit any of the AS or A level units they have previously taken (including controlled assessment units)?

- 12 Strongly agree, please see paragraph 4 above.

Question 3: To what extent do you agree or disagree that there should be an additional resit opportunity for legacy GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics (including the linked pair) in summer 2017?

- 13 Strongly agree, please see paragraphs 5 to 8 above.

Question 4: To what extent do you agree or disagree that, with the exception of English, English language and mathematics (including the linked pair), there should not be a re-sit opportunity available for legacy GCSEs?

- 14 Strongly disagree, please see paragraph 9 above.

Questions 5 to 7: Do you have any comments on our draft General Condition D9?

15 Please see paragraph 10 above.

Question 7: To what extent do you agree or disagree that we adopt the same saving and transitional provisions, amended as necessary, in respect of all further legacy AS and A level qualifications, without further consultation?

16 Please see paragraph 9 above. ASCL agrees in general with the approach, but not with the intention of denying an opportunity to resit after twelve months.

Question 8: Do you have any comments on our draft saving and transitional provisions for legacy GCSEs in English, English language and mathematics (including the linked pair)?

17 No.

Question 9: We have not identified any ways in which our proposals on re-sits would impact (positively or negatively) on persons who share a protected characteristic. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified?

18 Yes. Please see paragraph 8 above. It seems likely that not being able to resit after twelve months would have a disproportionate effect on the most vulnerable students, including those with several of the protected characteristics.

Question 10: Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impact resulting from these proposals on persons who share a protected characteristic?

19 Provision of a resit after twelve months in all cases would help.

Question 11: Have you any other comments on the impacts of the proposals on students who share a protected characteristic?

20 No.

Question 12: Do you have any comments on the impacts of our proposals on students, schools/colleges and/or exam boards?

21 Yes, please see paragraphs 6 to 9 above.

22 I hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

Martin Ward
Public Affairs Director
Association of School and College Leaders
2 February 2016