

[REDACTED]

From: [REDACTED] (Ofqual official)
Sent: 09 September 2011 12:47
To: [REDACTED] (Ofqual official)
Cc: Fiona Pethick; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: AQA GCSE History

[REDACTED]

Thanks for confirming. I'm copying to [REDACTED] and Fiona here as I'm on leave for the next two weeks. Both are up to speed on this matter for next week.

Best wishes

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 September 2011 12:35
To: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: AQA GCSE History

Thanks again. For your info this is what I've now circulated internally:

"I am writing to update you on the recent incident over one of the AQA GCSE History specifications, in which:

1. During the awarding process AQA made a grade boundary adjustment.
2. The adjustment was not properly applied, resulting in 332 students in 105 centres getting too high a grade.
3. Following discussions with Ofqual, AQA decided to adjust the provisional grades to the correct level and have informed centres and candidates accordingly (letters attached).

How bad was this?

Clearly the incident should not have happened and it will have been stressful for the students involved and their families. And the incident is of course particularly unfortunate in the context of an unusually bad year for errors. But I would suggest that this is an incident:

1. that is comparatively small scale (in terms of numbers affected); and

2. with a system of the scale and complexity as this such glitches are to be expected each season and in other (less high profile years) this would be a business as usual issue to resolve.

I am not aware of any media interest to date.

What happened

I set out below a summary of the facts as provided by Ofqual.

- On the day that GCSE results were released, AQA identified a system issue which meant that for a particular unit the incorrect unit boundary mark was implemented. The particular specification was GCSE History specification A which had an overall volume of aggregating candidates of 14052, within this specification the relevant unit (2D) had 6432 students entered (of whom 6350 were aggregating).
- The unit boundary mark was finalised and signed off by the responsible officer although earlier in the process it had been a single mark lower. This change was applied at unit level but when the results were being implemented this change did not flow through to the subject totals. As a consequence 334 students had received a grade higher than they would have done had the signed off boundary been followed through.
- The position which AQA initially took was to retain the approved boundary of 36 yet honour the grades mistakenly awarded to the 334 candidates as a result of the process issue.
- Ofqual took a principled position in that the correct results should be issued and where issues occur these should be corrected. Ofqual recognised that there is mixed custom and practice in this regard and agreement of the policy principles needed to be agreed with DfES and CCEA and the AOs consulted as part of informing this agreement.
- Ofqual asked AQA's responsible officer to consider the position from a variety of angles. The decision was then taken by AQA to re-run and correct the results issued and simultaneously their senior examiners are re marking each students' units to make sure that final decisions can be expedited without the need for the EAR process to be used. AQA are therefore being explicit to centres that these remain provisional results. This was communicated to Ofqual.
- Centres have been contacted by telephone and letter and Ofqual are starting to receive calls on their helpdesk.
- Ofqual will receive from AQA a report on the root cause in the coming weeks and take a view on whether further remedial or assurance action is required.

Media angle

- Ofqual Press Office lines: "AQA informed Ofqual of an error it made when producing the provisional awards of its History GCSE. While this will be unwelcome news for those affected the exam board's decision is fair to all GCSE candidates."
- We [Ofqual] plan to direct enquiries to AQA's press office if we get any approaches. "

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 September 2011 09:46
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Fiona Pethick; Francis Thomas; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: AQA GCSE History

[REDACTED]

Thanks for this. Just a couple of observations. Whilst we have been looking at this from a principle / precedent perspective it is important that it was AQA's decision to put right the issue, not ours. There will be further debate on this and other principles at play as the coming months progress.

I agree that this is comparatively small scale and in other (less high profile years) this sort of incident would be a business as usual issue to resolve. I think its also fair to say that in a system of the scale and complexity as this small glitches such as this are to be expected each season and our priority is ensuring there is clarity about and commitment to the principles which help put right these things on the occasions when they occur.

Happy to discuss if a phone call helps give a sense of this.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 September 2011 09:28
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: Fiona Pethick; Francis Thomas; [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: AQA GCSE History

Thanks for this [REDACTED], and for the info that Francis sent through in parallel. It's just what we needed.

Just the one follow up question. My feeling about this is:

- that clearly the incident shouldn't have happened and must be very stressful for the students involved. (I'd have been angry if I'd have been a parent of a student concerned, and the wording of the letter from AQA and the opaque explanation of what happened would have done nothing but provoked me further ...)
- however, the awarding body has done what it should to remedy the situation, not least thanks to your actions
- it is noteworthy partly because you have been setting a precedent in terms of your response and what you expect of awarding bodies
- and the incident is particularly unfortunate in that it is 'yet another ...' in a bad year for errors
- but that in itself, if there hadn't been this context of a spate of errors, it would not have been especially high profile in that each year there would typically be some mistakes having a similar impact on grades

Does that feel about right, particularly the final point? I ask partly because it is that judgement that will partly determine how widely I need to brief people here about what happened.

Any chance of a brief reply this morning pl?

All good wishes

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From: [redacted]
Sent: 08 September 2011 11:11
To: [redacted] Fiona Pethick
Cc: [redacted]
Subject: AQA GCSE History

As requested please find attached a short summary on this matter.

On the day that GCSE results were released, AQA identified a system issue which meant that for a particular unit the incorrect unit boundary mark was implemented. The particular specification was GCSE History specification A which had an overall volume of aggregating candidates of 14052 within this specification the relevant unit (2D) had 6432 students entered (of whom 6350 were aggregating).

The unit boundary mark was finalised and signed off by the responsible officer although earlier in the process it had been a single mark lower. This change was applied at unit level but when the results were being implemented this change did not flow through to the subject totals. As a consequence 334 students have a grade higher than they would have done had the signed off boundary been followed through.

The position which AQA initially took was to retain the approved boundary of 36 yet honour the grades mistakenly awarded to the 334 candidates as a result of the process issue.

Ofqual took a principled position in that the correct results should be issued and where issues occur these should be corrected. We recognised that there is mixed custom and practice in this regard and agreement of the policy principles need to be agreed with DfES and CCEA and the AOs consulted as part of informing this agreement.

On Monday Ofqual asked AQA's responsible officer to consider the position from a variety of angles. The decision was then taken by AQA to re-run and correct the results issued and simultaneously their senior examiners are re marking each students' units to make sure that final decisions can be expedited without the need for the EAR process to be used. AQA are therefore being explicit to centres that these remain provisional results. This was communicated to Ofqual yesterday.

Centres are being contacted by telephone and letter today and we are starting to receive calls on our helpdesk.

We will receive from AQA a report on the root cause in the coming weeks and take a view on whether further remedial or assurance action is required.

I'm available most of today if you'd like to discuss any of this.

Best wishes

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 08 September 2011 10:06
To: [REDACTED] Fiona Pethick
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Errors

Thanks [REDACTED] I'll forward that to our Press Office.

Could someone let me have a few bullets as to what actually happened, with what impact and what the follow up/remedial action is, so that I can take a view on what (if anything) Ministers need to be alerted to today pl?

Thanks

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From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 08 September 2011 10:00
To: Fiona Pethick; [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Errors

[REDACTED]

Apologies, I've been in meetings until now. The line which we're taking is below:

"AQA informed Ofqual of an error it made when producing the provisional awards of its History GCSE. While this will be unwelcome news for those affected the exam board's decision is fair to all GCSE candidates."

We plan to direct enquiries to AQA's press office if we get any approaches.

If you would like any further information feel free to call on the mobile number below.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

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From: Fiona Pethick
Sent: 08 September 2011 09:54
To: [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: RE: Errors

[REDACTED]

I hope [redacted] has sent across our line to take to Helen but I will check whether this provides you with enough information.

I would also like to touch base with you about [redacted] I will ask [redacted] to fix something up later today or tomorrow.

Fiona

Fiona Pethick
Director of Regulation, Ofqual

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From: [redacted]
Sent: 08 September 2011 09:35
To: Fiona Pethick
Subject: Errors

Fiona

Thanks for the call last night, on which Helen has fed back. I'll be the lead this end on anything that we need to do.

I probably ought to put up a short note to Ministers' offices alerting them to what's been discovered and suggesting a line for Press Office to take. I understand that you kindly agreed to let us have something in writing on what has happened and the lines your Press Office are using etc. I'll wait to hear from you over that before taking any action.

All the best

[redacted]

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