

**From:** Jeremy Benson <Jeremy.Benson@Ofqual>  
**Sent:** 04 September 2012 13:35  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** RE: URGENT CLEARANCE REQUIRED: Correspondence on GCSE English grade boundary changes  
**Attachments:** GCSE English - draft reply v3 0 (4 Sept) HB cleared.docx

Thanks – a few suggestions from me – but obviously you're independent so what you say is up to you.

Jeremy

Jeremy Benson  
Deputy Director - Policy, Ofqual

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**From:** [REDACTED]  
**Sent:** 04 September 2012 12:59  
**To:** Jeremy Benson  
**Cc:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** URGENT CLEARANCE REQUIRED: Correspondence on GCSE English grade boundary changes  
**Importance:** High

Hi Jeremy,

I've tried phoning but the engaged tone is constant. I'm attaching a draft template reply that we are seeking to use in response to the ever growing backlog of MP letters received on GCSE English marking.

The lines reflect what is already stated policy on quals reform at 16, but also contain elements of what the Sec of State said in parliament yesterday. Very grateful if you could consider and clear as soon as possible please. I'm in a meeting from 3-4 pm discussing all this, but happy to speak in between.

Many thanks.

[REDACTED]

Web: [www.education.gov.uk](http://www.education.gov.uk)



Department  
for Education

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XXXX MP  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

[Your ref:]

January 2013

Thank you for your letter of [date], [addressed to XXXX], enclosing correspondence from your constituent/on behalf of your constituent[s], [xxxx of xxx full address], about [the grading of GCSEs].

This year's grading of GCSE English qualifications in particular [use when GCSE English + other subjects are raised] has caused significant concern. Ofqual, the independent regulator for qualifications in England, has conducted an investigation of the grading decisions taken by exam boards. Ofqual published its initial report on 31 August and this can be obtained via the Ofqual website at [www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-08-31-gcse-english-awards-2012-a-regulatory-report.pdf](http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-08-31-gcse-english-awards-2012-a-regulatory-report.pdf).

The report notes that for English GCSEs this summer, a complex and unique set of circumstances came together to create a highly unusual situation for schools and their students. Ofqual believes the standard set for English GCSEs this year is comparable with the standard in previous years: the June 2012 grade boundaries were properly set, with candidates' work graded to the right standard. Ofqual believes that, with the benefit of hindsight, January grade boundaries were set too generously. Ofqual has also, however, found a greater variation between schools' results than would have been expected. It is looking into the issues further and will produce a final report in October.

The Education Committee of the House of Commons is also looking into the issues, and took oral evidence from Ofqual, head teacher representatives and [the Secretary of State/me] on 11-12 September. Details can be found on the Parliament website at: [www.parliament.uk/education-committee](http://www.parliament.uk/education-committee). The Committee's investigation continues; as a next step it [will be asking/has asked] further detailed questions of Ofqual [NB – Ofqual expects to receive the Committee's questions on 18 September].

Decisions on standards, results, grades and grade setting for all GCSEs are the

responsibility of exam boards and the independent regulator, Ofqual, which is accountable to Parliament. Ofqual rightly takes its responsibilities over tackling grade inflation and maintaining standards in qualifications over time very seriously. Ministers and the Department have no role in making decisions about grade boundaries – this is a matter for exam boards and the regulator.

*[Insert optional material here as appropriate-]*

***If correspondence contains accusations of political interference:***

*The Ofqual report referred to above says “Ministers have not attempted to influence our decisions on standards, results, grades or grade setting”.*

***If correspondence calls on Ministers to intervene to get grades changed:***

*It would not be appropriate for Ministers to direct Ofqual what action to take. It is fundamental to our exams system that the regulator can make its decisions without political intervention.]*

***If correspondence cites Welsh Government’s decision to re-grade GCSE English exams:***

*The Welsh Government is the regulator of qualifications in Wales. The English system is completely different – Ofqual is the Independent Regulator, accountable to parliament.*

***If correspondence cites unfairness:***

*>>>>?*

I do have enormous sympathy for the young people who took GCSEs this year and did not get the results they expected. We need to raise standards in all our schools and give every child the opportunity to acquire the rigorous qualifications they need to succeed in further and higher education and employment.

[The Secretary of State/I] announced in Parliament on 17 September the Government’s proposals to restore confidence in our exam system. We propose to do this by replacing the current GCSE with a new qualification, the English Baccalaureate Certificate. They will be rigorous exams which equip children for the 21<sup>st</sup> century and allow us to compete with the best performing nations in the world. Further information about the proposals, including the consultation on their implementation, is available at:

<http://www.education.gov.uk/schools/teachingandlearning/qualifications/gcses/b00213896/ks4-qualification>.

In the meantime, we look to Ofqual and the exam boards to make sure that the current GCSEs and the systems that underpin them are as robust as possible for the young people who will take them in the coming year.

I am copying this letter and yours to Ofqual’s Chief Regulator, Glenys Stacey. Please pass on my thanks to [xxx] for writing to you on this important issue.