

**From:** Jeremy Benson <Jeremy.Benson@Ofqual.Gov.Uk>  
**Sent:** 23 August 2012 10:02  
**To:** BEGOL, Hardip (DfE officials)  
**Cc:** PAIGE, Anna; [REDACTED] Glenys Stacey; Dennis Opposs; [REDACTED] Fiona Pethick  
**Subject:** RE: URGENT 9.45am - Questions: GCSEs  
**Importance:** High

Hardip

See answers below. It would be helpful to read <http://www.ofqual.gov.uk/files/2012-05-09-maintaining-standards-in-summer-2012.pdf>, the document I mentioned when we spoke yesterday. That explains the comparable outcomes approach, which we are applying across all subjects at GCSE (the approach has been used with A levels since 2009 and was first used with GCSEs last year – although not until this year in English and maths). The approach is about grading (setting grade boundaries) not marking – ie how well a candidate has to do to get a particular grade.

There are a number of related issues with standard-setting in English this year:

- we are moving to comparable outcomes for the first time, because these are the first awards of the GCSEs first taught in Sept 2010
- there is a new set of GCSEs – in the past most students took English and some took Eng Lit too; now, some students take English, and some (usually the more able) take both English Language and English Lit. So the results are not easily comparable with previous years (esp as increasing numbers are moving to iGCSEs). As always with new qualifications, some teachers will find it more difficult than others to get to grips with the new requirements.
- grading a modular qualification, particularly in the first year, will always be challenging (obviously this problem will be resolved when we move away from modular qualifications starting this coming academic year) because standards in individual modules have to be set before the impact on the overall qualification can be checked. The controlled assessment issue is a function of this.

Jeremy

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**Sent:** 23 August 2012 08:48



Subject: URGENT 9.45am - Questions: GCSEs

DfE OFFICIAL

Jeremy, it would be helpful to have answers to the questions below for our internal use at the moment please – could we have them for 9.45am please

1/When was the decision taken which governed marking of June papers/modules in GCSE English? There have been no specific decisions relating to GCSE English. The Ofqual Board decided in 2010 to move to comparable outcomes for the new GCSEs that were awarded for the first time in most subjects in 2011, and for some (including English) in 2012 – it was already being used for A levels. The impact of comparable outcomes on individual subjects will depend on how the marking and grading across the modules develops, and how that compares with expectations from previous years. The aim is to secure standards more firmly year on year, including when new qualifications are introduced, by comparing the actual outcomes with the expected outcomes given the prior attainment of the students.

2/Who took it? Ofqual

3/How was that decision communicated to exam boards? We have regular technical discussions with the people in the exam boards responsible for standard setting. We have also discussed it regularly with the chief executives.

4/What did they say at the time? They have been supportive of the approach. It is transparent and clear.

5/Who was informed in the Department? We have published information on our website about comparable outcomes for some time, and drawn it to the attention of the Department. (An open letter to schools about the approach relating to A levels was published early in 2010, and when I was in the Department I remember discussing it with Ofqual at the time. There has also been at least one workshop with DfE officials in the past).

6/What were they told? See above

7/What is the answer to the question - January modules leniently marked - June modules harshly marked - therefore inherent unfairness between candidates in the same year? We had to make sure that the qualification level results this summer secured standards. That meant looking again at grade boundaries for units when they were taken in June. Had we stuck with the January grade boundaries, the effect would have been grade inflation which we could not have justified. We think it is likely that the standard was set too leniently in January, but we made the judgement that we should not require those units to be regraded.

8/What was in that module/controlled assessment exercise? - Can I see the papers? And the mark schemes? There will be different specifications from the different boards, many of which will have been affected. We could try and get some samples from the exam boards if that would help.

9/Does this affect foundation tier papers or higher tier papers or both? Both

10/What is the overall distribution of As, Bs Cs etc across the country? I think you have the figures – we can dig them out if not

11/Has anyone raised objections to this process prior to today? The comparable outcomes approach has been welcomed by the exam boards. You will have seen that concern has been raised by teacher associations and others, which was noted in the letter Glenys sent yesterday. But we think it's the best approach we have.

Hardip

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