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Hi all

FYI - the questions we received yesterday from the Select Committee. We have to respond by 18 October.

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Education Committee
2012 GCSE English results
Further questions for Ofqual

Market share

- 1) Please supply a breakdown of market share (in % and numbers of candidates) for GCSE English, GCSE English Language and GCSE English Literature across the exam boards for candidates in England in 2012 and for the equivalent syllabuses in 2011.

Variations in performance in summer 2012

- 2) What have you learnt since your initial report about the pattern of results across schools and colleges? What more do you know about whether some types of school/college been disproportionately affected and the reasons for this? What more do you know about the types of schools/colleges that have done better than expected or that have seen improvements in their English results and the reasons why?
 - For each exam board, how many centres had a 5, 10 or 15+ percentage point change in outcomes compared to summer 2011, and how many of these centres had improved outcomes and how many had lower outcomes?
 - Please send analyses against as many variables as you have to try to establish patterns and the reasons for these patterns, both for centres which did very well and vice versa: e.g. type, region, size, upper age, % foundation tier/% higher tier, most recent Ofsted rating, GCSE Maths results, standard deviation of previous years' English results, proportion of re-sit candidates, proportion of January/June entrants.
 - Please supply a sample of statistical outliers (in both directions) and establish in depth with the centre what happened and why.
- 3) You mentioned in oral evidence that candidates at the C/D borderline and in FE colleges seem to have been particularly affected. What more do you know about groups of candidates that have been most affected and the reasons for this?
- 4) Is there a link between the variation in performance at school/college-level and the comparable outcomes approach?
- 5) How does the school-level variation seen in summer 2012 compare to the school-level variation that occurred in 2010 and 2011?
- 6) Have concerns been raised with you about results in other GCSE subjects? If so, please send details.

Impact of modular syllabuses

- 7) Please explain all the different routes through GCSE English, English Language and English Literature syllabuses that students could take and how well candidates on each route have performed.
- 8) What % of candidates in England who achieved grade C or above and grade A or above took one or more units before June 2012 and what % took all of their units in June 2012?
- 9) How many centres chose to put their students through GCSE English, English Language and English Literature early, compared to the previous year?

10) Since your initial report, what more have you learnt about the differences in entry patterns between January and June?

- Do some types of centre tend to enter candidates in January and/or June?
- Do schools/colleges enter different types of candidates in January and/or June?
- What impact does this have on aggregation outcomes?
- What have you done to try to ensure equity between exam series?

January and June awards

Please detail the following for candidates in England and in Wales:

- 11) For each exam board and each English syllabus (English, English Language and English Literature), please set out the grade boundary marks for each unit in January and June and the % of candidates achieving grades A*-U by unit and overall.
- 12) Overall and for each exam board, how many students took a GCSE in each of the English syllabuses in January and in June 2012?
- 13) Overall, what number and proportion of candidates achieved grade A*, A, B, C and D in English, English Language and English Literature in January 2012 and in June 2012?
- 14) How do the figures for question 13 compare with the previous year's GCSE results?

January awards

- 15) Why do you judge that the January awards were generous? What evidence is there to support this?
- 16) Why was it only possible to know retrospectively that the January awards were generous?
- 17) Given that it was known that the January 2012 awards would set a benchmark for schools/colleges and that some of the entrants for the January modules would be cashing in their assessments for a subject grade, what steps did Ofqual take to ensure that the exam boards made awards which met the required standard at each of the grades which were determined by judgement? What evidence were the exam boards expected/required to use?
- 18) What proportion of the January entry cashed in for a subject grade? On what basis did Ofqual and the exam boards conclude initially that these awards appeared to be harsh? At what stage, and on what evidence, did the view change to the awards being lenient? If this was prior to the summer grade awarding meetings, were exam boards alerted in advance to the need to tighten grade boundaries to ensure comparability with the awards of previous years?
- 19) Did Ofqual commission subject experts to observe the January awards in GCSE English? If so, please send the notes of any subject experts and/or Ofqual staff who observed the awards.
- 20) Please provide the Committee with copies of your exchanges (correspondence and e-mail) with each of the exam boards between 1 December 2011 and 1 March 2012 relating to the January GCSE awards (in any or all subjects), plus notes of any meetings during that period with any or all of the exam boards about the January GCSE awards.

June awards

- 21) Did the January 2012 outcomes have a bearing on the June 2012 outcomes and if so, how? Were the June exams graded more harshly to compensate for the generous January awards? It has been suggested that too many grade Cs were awarded in January 2012, leaving too few available in June 2012. Is this the case?
- 22) Were June exams graded to make them directly comparable with GCSE English exams in previous years or were they graded to make 2012 exams overall comparable on average, given that the January awards were deemed to be generous?
- 23) Did the June 2012 written papers have to be graded more harshly to compensate for stronger performance on controlled assessment units in order to avoid grade inflation? Was this of greater impact than the difference between the January and June outcomes?
- 24) What were the 'unknowns' in January 2012 which were known in June 2012 and why?
- 25) What evidence is there to suggest that schools/colleges shouldn't have been 'taken by surprise' by the variation in grade boundaries between January and June 2012 results?
- 26) You have said that "had the grade boundaries for January carried through to June, there would have been very significant grade inflation."¹ How much grade inflation would have occurred overall and how was this distributed across the exam boards? How many students would have gained a grade C had the January grade boundaries been carried through to June?
- 27) What sort of adjustments did you ask WJEC to make to its grade boundaries?
- 28) Did Ofqual at any point ask (or consider asking) AQA or OCR to reconsider their grade boundaries?
- 29) Please provide the Committee with all exchanges and notes of meetings between you and the exam boards about the summer GCSE awards between 1 June 2012 and 1 September 2012.
- 30) Please supply the Committee with copies of the reports from staff and subject experts who observed GCSE English awarding meetings in any of the exam boards for the summer 2012 awards.
- 31) Can you confirm that the statistical outcomes of the summer 2012 English award related solely to the candidates who were cashing in their assessments for a subject grade in June 2012 - i.e. the statistical picture did not include those candidates who received their subject grade in January?
- 32) How many students in England were affected by the changes made to Edexcel's grade boundaries as a result of Ofqual's intervention at each grade A*-U?
- 33) What alternative courses of action have you considered with regard to the summer 2012 GCSE English results and why did you reject them?
- 34) What advice have you received from your Standards Advisory Group regarding the 2012 GCSE English results and the action you have taken? What advice has the Group given you in connection with next year's awards?

Comparable outcomes

- 35) What modelling did you do to test the likely effect of the comparable outcomes approach on results in GCSE English?

¹ Ofqual report p16

- 36) How do you distinguish grade inflation from genuine underlying improvement? Under what circumstances would rising pass rates be legitimate, using the comparable outcomes methodology?
- 37) How do you guard against a centre's grades going down because other schools/colleges have improved, even though within the centre the performance is similar to previous years (i.e. they suffer a relative decline even though they are doing as well as before in absolute terms)?
- 38) Given the changes in entry patterns and the difficulty in predicting overall changes in outcomes, how reliable was the comparable outcomes approach as a basis for awarding decisions in GCSE English in June 2012?
- 39) At what level does the comparable outcomes approach work? Is it based on national KS2 data or does it drill down to the performance of individual schools/colleges or pupils, as some have suggested? How reliable is the KS2 data?
- 40) What additional statistical evidence was available to help define outcomes e.g. sub-cohort data such as relative performance by school type or year group or with other subjects?
- 41) Is the comparable outcomes approach at risk of being discredited by what has happened with GCSE English? What alternatives could be used instead?
- 42) How much use of candidates' work, as well as grade descriptions and archive material, was made to confirm that the grade boundaries selected gave comparable outcomes in terms of what students could demonstrate, as compared to statistical indicators? Are you satisfied that, at the grade boundaries selected in June 2012 by each of the exam boards, the work demonstrated by students was of the right standard? How robust do you think that evidence is?
- 43) Are you satisfied that the work of candidates just below the grade C boundary could be demonstrated **not** to meet the requirements for a grade C when compared to any exemplar material or statement of standards?

Controlled assessment and moderation

- 44) What steps did awarding bodies take to (a) ensure that teachers were well prepared to assess candidates' work, (b) moderate the assessments and (c) what feedback did schools/colleges get?
- 45) What steps were taken to ensure that teachers understood that the grade boundaries set in January would not automatically be carried forward to the June examination?
- 46) Some schools have said that they were advised by exam boards that the controlled assessment grade boundaries were unlikely to change. What guidance will you be asking exam boards to issue to ensure that this does not happen again?
- 47) What reassurances are you giving teachers that changes to controlled assessment grade boundaries will be properly communicated in future?
- 48) Was there any change in the relationship between candidates' ability and their controlled assessment scores between January and June 2012?
- 49) Your initial report states that for AQA "the majority of folders for controlled assessment were within the marking tolerance but had been over-marked by teachers, particularly at the grade C/D borderline."² How widespread was this "significant teacher over-marking"?

² Original report p13

- 50) What evidence do the exam boards and Ofqual have that supports the allegation that schools/colleges have been getting increasingly over-generous (or maximising their results) in their assessment of students' work? Is there analysis from previous English syllabuses that shows an increasing disparity between written papers and teacher assessments?
- 51) Why did the exam boards not deal with teacher over-marking through better moderation rather than by changing grade boundaries?
- 52) What is the marking tolerance which is allowed before a moderator adjusts marks? Why is there a tolerance?
- 53) How much scaling and moderation was applied to the June 2012 controlled assessments? How does this compare to the scaling and moderation in 2011 and 2010?
- 54) While exam paper grade boundaries may need to move slightly from one series to the next, how is it possible that controlled assessments using the same titles and the same mark schemes would also need to be changed?
- 55) What are the moderation arrangements for speaking and listening controlled assessment?

Risk management

- 56) What risks were reported to the Ofqual Audit Committee and Board between August 2011 and September 2012 relating to the January and summer 2012 GCSE awards? Did English syllabuses specifically feature in the risk register and those reports?
- 57) What are the relative risks of using January's standards or June's standards? Did you consider whether the risk of impacting students' life chances outweighed the risk of devaluing the GCSE or allowing students into HE or employment without the requisite skills?
- 58) With so many changes happening at once, what safeguards are in place to disentangle all the elements and keep a clear national 'standard'?

Ofqual investigation

- 59) If your further investigations reveal that students have been deprived by the system of grades their work deserved, will you be prepared to reverse your decision not to re-visit grade boundaries?
- 60) Why would a re-grading of boundaries of GCSE English and English Language **not** be considered to be fair?

Possible independent inquiry

- 61) Has the Ofqual Board considered whether to commission an independent inquiry into why the problems with GCSE English occurred this year and which organisations (if any) were at fault, similar to the inquiry commissioned into National Curriculum Test delivery failure in 2008? If they have considered this, what were their reasons for deciding not to commission such an inquiry?

Relationships with Wales

- 62) WJEC is faced with contradictory instructions from the Welsh Government and the English regulator. On what grounds could Ofqual fairly consider

excluding WJEC from the market of English schools/colleges if they follow the instructions from Welsh Ministers?

- 63) How is it fair that a Welsh student living on one side of the Welsh/English border can be given one grade, while a student in England with the same score in the same exam is given a lower grade?