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Rules for GCSE specifications

Terminal requirements, re-sits and cashing-in

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Notes for teachers and examination officers

Summary

- Virtually all GCSE qualifications are unitised and students can take assessments during the course. **NB:** Students certificating after June 2013, or after November 2013 for GCSE English, English Language and Mathematics, **must** take all assessments at the end of their course.
- The qualifications are designed as two-year courses and students may still take all the assessments at the end of the course.
- Students **must** take at least 40%, and may take up to 100%, of the assessment in the final examination series when they certificate.
- This 40% terminal requirement means that there is limited flexibility in the way that students can progress through the course.
- **Students may only re-sit a unit once before certification.**
- **The better result for the two attempts at a unit counts, as long as the 40% terminal requirement is satisfied.**
- For specifications for first teaching from September 2009, the first Full Course GCSE awards were made in June 2011 and there were special arrangements if students completed all the units before then. **No special arrangements will be applied after June 2011.**
- For the English, mathematics and ICT specifications for first teaching from September 2010, the first Full Course GCSE awards will be made in June 2012 and there are special arrangements in place for students who complete all the units before then (see page 5).
- For science specifications for first teaching from September 2011, the first GCSE science awards will be made in June 2012 and the first GCSE awards in the other sciences in June 2013. No special arrangements are necessary for GCSE sciences.

For GCSE qualifications that are unitised:

- the specifications are made up of individual units;
- each unit is assessed by either a written paper or a controlled assessment;
- the units contribute to an overall subject cash-in¹;
- students **must** sit all the units which contribute to the cash-in;
- students **must** be entered for each individual unit;
- students **must** also be entered for the subject cash-in in the terminal examination series;
- the cash-in leads to certification with a grade.

¹ Cash-in is the term often used for the request to certificate the overall qualification.

The rules for GCSEs vary significantly from the rules for GCE AS and A level qualifications and from the rules for the previous linear and modular GCSEs. These notes should help you to ensure that your students are entered correctly: resolving eligibility problems is time-consuming, difficult and stressful for all – teachers, examination officers, students and even awarding bodies.

UMS

Uniform Mark Scales (UMS) will be used to aggregate marks from individual assessment units. After the grade boundaries for a question paper or a controlled assessment are decided, the marks (also referred to as 'raw' marks) are converted to a UMS mark. The same standard of performance on the papers taken at a different time always gets the same number of UMS marks. This allows awarding bodies to use and compare results from one examination series to the next. The number of uniform marks for each unit depends on its weighting and on the maximum uniform mark for the qualification as a whole.

What are the rules?

These complex, detailed rules are to ensure a 'level playing-field'. They include details on:

- terminal assessments;
- re-sitting;
- cashing-in Short/Full Course and Single/Double Award GCSEs.

Terminal requirement

- **At least 40% of the assessment must be taken in the examination series in which the qualification is certificated.**
- **The final grade will include the assessment results which satisfy this terminal requirement.**

This means that students must complete their course by taking units that make up at least 40% of the weighting for the whole qualification. The results for the units that satisfy this 40% terminal requirement will count (i.e. they will be used to calculate the grade), even if a better score for an earlier attempt at one or more of these units exists.

Re-sit rules

- **Students may re-sit each unit once.**
- Options within an assessment unit and optional units are treated as separate units with regard to re-sits.
- **A tiered unit or tiered option may be re-sat once at either tier** (it is not permissible to make two attempts at each tier of a tiered unit).
- **The better result counts towards the final grade. However, if a unit forms part of the terminal requirement then the most recent result must be used (see above).**

How do Foundation and Higher Tiers work?

In a Foundation tier unit targeted at grades C–G, the maximum uniform mark available will be equivalent to a top grade C. In a Higher tier unit, the target grades are A*–D, with an allowed grade E. Unlike un-tiered and Foundation tier units, this allowed E is a half grade width.

In tiered subjects with unit results from different tiers, the awarding body will generate the best grade for the student using the optimum combination. Therefore, students may:

- take different units at different tiers;
- re-sit a unit at a different tier (once only);

and the awarding body will calculate the best grade (subject to the terminal requirement and re-sit rules).

Re-taking a qualification

- **A qualification may be taken more than once** – either by re-sitting all the units, or by re-sitting some units and re-using previous results for others, subject to the terminal requirement being satisfied.
- **When a qualification is re-taken, a student may have up to two further attempts at each unit. However, only the better of the last two results will count towards the final grade; or the last if it is used to satisfy the terminal requirement.**

Can we decline GCSE grades?

Students cannot decline certification of GCSE awards after the results have been published.

Can we transfer GCSE units or grades between awarding bodies?

Students cannot transfer individual GCSE units from one awarding body to another. Additionally, it is not permissible for students to transfer an award, e.g. a GCSE Short Course award, from one awarding body to another. Units from a GCSE Short Course award cannot be transferred from one awarding body to another in order to enable the student to 'top up' units for a Full Course award.

Eligibility

Students will be eligible for a qualification only when they have entered for a valid combination of units and for the cash-in.

What if the student is absent?

It is the result of, not the entry for, an assessment unit that counts. A student who enters for a unit but is absent from the examination has not used up one of his/her two possible attempts. However, for award purposes, absence from an assessment unit will be treated as a result of zero marks for that unit.

How do Short/Full Courses and Single/Double Awards work?

There are:

- **Short courses** – worth half a GCSE;
- **Full courses** – worth a Single Award GCSE;
- **Double Award GCSEs** – with a double grade.

In some subjects (e.g. Modern Foreign Languages) there are Short and Full courses, with common units. Similarly in some of the Applied subjects (Applied Business, Health and Social Care, Leisure and Tourism) there are Single and Double Awards with common units.

Students may:

- complete the smaller subject after one year, then 'top up' to complete the larger one;
or
- wait and enter simultaneously for a Double Award, Full Course award and a Short Course award in the same subject (where they exist) upon completion of all the necessary units (provided that the terminal requirement is satisfied for each award).

The following rules will apply:

- The results of units used for a Short Course award remain available for use towards a Full Course award and/or a Double Award (and vice-versa).
- **A result from any unit can be counted towards only one GCSE title.** For example, if a unit can contribute to both Business Studies and Economics, a result from that unit cannot be used to count towards certification in both titles.
- **Following certification, each unit may be re-taken once or twice.** For example, a unit which had been taken twice prior to the certification of a Short Course award could then be re-taken on one or two further occasions prior to certification of a Full Course award and/or a Double Award. **However, only the better of the last two results will count towards the final grade; or the last if it is used for the terminal requirement.**
- A student must satisfy the terminal requirement for a **Short Course award**, a **Full Course award** and a **Double Award** when certification is claimed. The terminal requirement for each award can be met through the use of common units.

Compensatory awards

- An awarding body will not make an automatic compensatory award to a student who is, for example, 'Unclassified' for a Full Course and/or a Double Award, but has unit results which would gain a grade for a Short Course award. However, the student will be allowed to make a late subject award claim for the Short Course award within a specified period after the publication of results.

Will my students get the best results?

Once the 40% terminal requirement has been applied, the awarding body will generate the best grade for students from the available results:

- if they have re-taken a unit;
- if they have taken more units than they need to (where there are optional units);
- if there is more than one valid combination of unit results (again, where there are optional units);
- if there are results from different tiers.

How long will the individual unit results be valid?

The unit results remain valid during the shelf life of the specification.

My students would rather wait and cash-in when they have their best results. Can they do this?

There will be an opportunity (within a specified period) to cash-in after results are published. However, **a student must meet the terminal requirement in that examination series**.

Enquiries about results

Enquiries about results **must** be submitted immediately after the examination series in which the relevant unit was taken. It will not be possible to re-mark a unit in a subsequent examination series when it is cashed-in. A unit can only be re-marked immediately after the result has been issued.

Are there any special rules for 2012 and 2013?

For the English, mathematics and ICT specifications for first teaching from September 2010, Short Courses can be cashed-in from the June 2011 series, but the Full and Double Award GCSEs cannot be cashed-in until the June 2012 series. For some subjects all the units are available before June 2012 and students could take all the assessments to complete their qualifications before then. There is a special rule to cover this situation. It is designed to ensure that students are not disadvantaged, rather than to encourage completing these courses early.

If a student completes all of the assessments required for a Full GCSE award prior to the June 2012 examination series, he/she may, in June 2012 only, certificate the GCSE, provided that the terminal requirement was satisfied in an earlier series. For example, where certification is deferred from June 2011 to June 2012, the determination of the grade will require that the terminal requirement was satisfied in June 2011, the examination series in which certification of the Full award would have been requested, had it been available. **In this example, no assessment results that post-date the June 2011 examination series will be included in the determination of the grade.**

For the science specifications for first teaching from September 2011, no special rules are necessary since a student cannot complete all of the GCSE Science units before June 2012, nor complete all of the units leading to any of the other GCSEs before June 2013.

For the specifications for first teaching from September 2009, the special rules were for June 2011 only. After June 2011, the terminal requirement must be satisfied in the examination series in which the cash-in is requested.