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By email: Lynne.Neagle@assembly.wales

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Dear Lynne

Provision of textbooks and learning resources for pupils

Thank you for inviting us to speak to the Committee about the availability of teaching and learning resources.

We have already provided some background on this matter in our earlier letter to you dated 13 March 2018. In it, we explained that the provision of textbooks and most other educational resources sit outside our regulatory remit. We also described how we require awarding bodies to use the comparable outcomes approach when awarding new qualifications for the first time.

This letter gives additional background information to help the Committee prepare for the forthcoming session on 2 May 2018.

Regulating resources for teaching and learning

Awarding bodies offer a range of services that are regulated by us, including designing qualifications, delivering assessments, and dealing with complaints and appeals. Awarding bodies must clearly describe what will be assessed within the specification for a qualification and exemplify what the assessments will entail in the sample assessment materials. The provision of supplementary teaching and learning resources falls largely outside the scope of our regulation.



When considering GCSEs and A levels for approval, we scrutinise the specifications for each qualification and the sample assessment materials. As part of this process we check that each specification makes clear what students are expected to know, understand and do, and that the sample assessments are valid and appropriate.

Subjects assessed at GCSE and A level are generally well established and supported by a wealth of existing teaching and learning resources. Where a qualification specifies that a specific set work will be assessed (such as a literary text, a piece of music, or a film) we check as part of the approval process whether these are easily available. Where an entirely new aspect of content is introduced to a specification, we seek assurance that sufficient teaching and learning resources will be available to support its study. In some instances, we have used grant funding to support the production of new materials, for example to support the introducing of new themes in reformed Modern Foreign Language qualifications and different focus areas in Design and Technology. The resources produced with our financial support are available bilingually and free of charge.

We do not require awarding bodies to provide bespoke learning resources specifically tailored to each specification. However, awarding bodies will often choose to produce additional materials to support teachers and learners. Where this is the case, we require awarding bodies to ensure that such supporting materials do not compromise the security and integrity of assessments. Our interest is limited, however, to safeguarding the qualifications we regulate; we do not regulate the teaching and learning resources themselves.

Our policy is to increase the availability of Welsh medium qualifications. We offer grant funding to awarding bodies to help meet the cost of making their qualifications available bilingually. The grant can be used to help with translating relevant teaching and learning resources, as well as assessment materials.

Assessing the use and availability of teaching and learning resources

We are looking more broadly at the question of what resources teachers and learners find useful. This is likely to vary across different subjects and possibly across different types of learning environment and teaching styles. As we develop our understanding, we will consider the implications for our work; particularly in relation to planning for future qualifications reform.

Factors affecting exam performance

The availability and quality of teaching and learning resources is one of many factors that can impact on the performance of a learner in an exam. Other factors include:

- How prepared the learner is for the examination both in terms of the teaching received and their own revision
- A learner's interest in the subject and motivation, for instance whether a student has chosen a subject, or sees it as relevant to their future
- Support and encouragement from family members and others

- Chance factors affecting a candidate’s experiences on the day of assessment, such as changes in personal circumstances, or simply whether the topics covered in the exam match those the candidate has best prepared for.

There are also factors that can affect the overall results of a school or college in a subject from one year to the next, particularly where the number of students entered is quite low.

These can include:

- Availability of teaching staff
- The combined potential of a given year’s cohort
- The familiarity of teachers with the qualification and how they have adapted to any changes to them.

When looking at the national results for a given qualification, it is not possible to isolate and quantify the effect that each of these different factors will have had on the overall picture. However, if one or more of these factors were to have a significant impact on performance, we might expect to see this reflected in results.

Given the committee’s previously expressed concerns about the new Religious Studies AS and A level, we take a closer look below at results for this subject.

Qualification outcomes for AS and A level Religious Studies

It is worth noting the following points when looking at AS and A level Religious Studies:

- Religious Studies was reformed as a Wales-only AS and A level for first teaching from September 2016. WJEC is the only awarding body that offers these qualifications.
- The new Religious Studies AS qualification was awarded for the first time in summer 2017 and the new A level will be awarded for the first time in summer 2018.
- There is no textbook available on the market, either in English or Welsh, that is specifically tailored to the new Wales-only specifications offered by WJEC.
- WJEC offers a range of bilingual, digital teaching and learning resources to support these qualifications on its website for no additional fee.
- Textbooks are available to support some of the new Religious Studies AS and A level specifications offered in England, with some covering a whole specification and others focussing on specific topics. These are only available in English.

Table 1: AS level results for Religious Studies, 2015 to 2017¹

AS level subject	Year	Number sat	Cumulative percentages by grade					U
			A	B	C	D	E	
Religious Studies	2017	1,984	18.8	41.4	62.9	81.1	92.1	100.0
	2016	2,446	15.3	37.9	62.0	79.4	90.3	100.0
	2015	2,535	16.1	41.6	66.1	82.2	92.0	100.0

Source: JCQ A, AS and AEA summer examination results

¹ Source: JCQ A, AS and AEA summer examination results <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels>

Table 1 shows the grade distributions achieved in the first award of the reformed Religious Studies AS level in 2017, compared to results achieved in the legacy² qualification in 2015 and 2016.

There were 462 fewer candidates sitting the reformed Religious Studies AS level in 2017 compared to the legacy qualification in 2016. The proportion of candidates achieving a grade of C or above rose from 62.0 per cent in 2016 to 62.9 per cent in 2017. 18.8 per cent of candidates achieved a grade of A in 2017 for the reformed AS level compared to 15.3 per cent in 2016 for the legacy qualification. Overall, while remaining broadly stable, the results for the new specification went up slightly in 2017 when compared to 2016.

Table 2: A level results for Religious Studies, 2016 and 2017³

A level subject	Year	Number sat	Cumulative percentages by grade						
			A*	A	B	C	D	E	U
Religious Studies	2017	1,735	3.2	18.6	49.2	77.3	92.3	98.0	100.0
	2016	1,892	3.6	18.6	51.7	79.2	93.8	98.2	100.0

Source: JCQ A, AS and AEA summer examination results

Table 2 shows the grade distributions achieved in the legacy Religious Studies A level in 2016 and 2017. The new Religious Studies A level will be awarded for the first time in summer 2018. There has been stability in the proportion of candidates achieving A*-A and A*-E in this period, although there was an 8% reduction in the size of the entry in 2017.

In the absence of any evidence of large changes in entry patterns or performance at A level, we would expect to see a similar stability in the A level results this summer compared to results in the legacy A level.

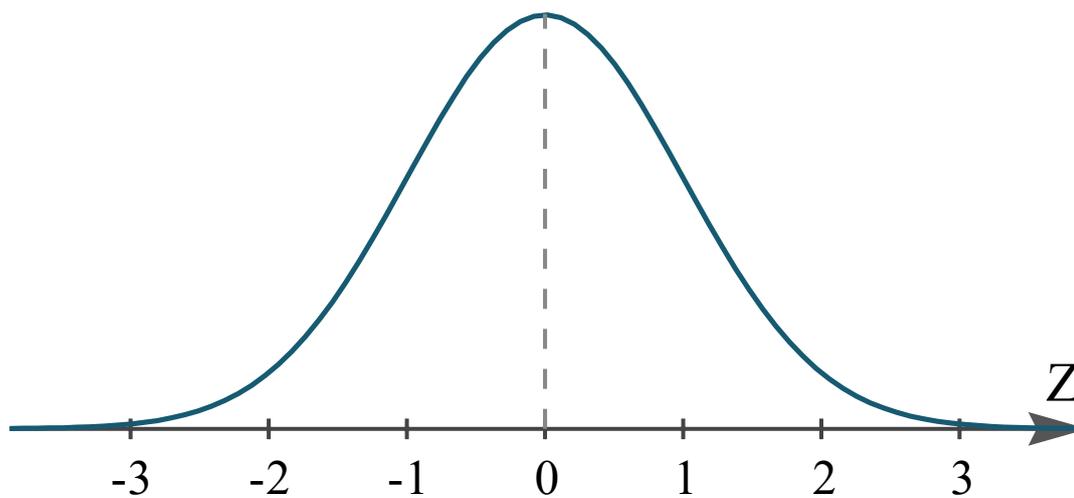
Outcomes by centre

During the summer series we monitor the variation in centre-level performance in reformed AS and A levels compared to the previous summer series. We would expect to see performance across all centres to vary in a way that would approximate a standard normal distribution (as shown in the chart below). This would mean that most centres would achieve results similar to the previous year and a smaller number of centres would do better or worse.

² Legacy qualifications is how we refer to previous specifications that have been replaced with newer versions.

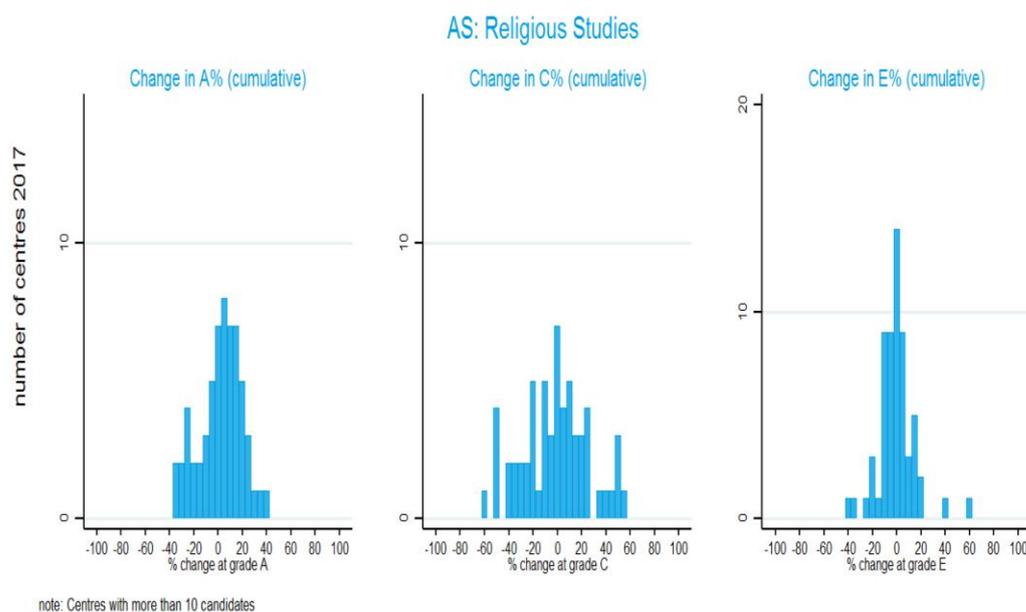
³ Source: JCQ A, AS and AEA summer examination results <https://www.jcq.org.uk/examination-results/a-levels>

Standard normal distribution



For each exam series, WJEC provide us with histograms showing, for centres with 10 or more entries, the percentage change in results at grades A, C and E. Centres with no change in the proportion of their candidates achieving those grades would appear in the middle of the plot. Centres that increased the proportion of their candidates achieving that grade would be shown to the right of the centre point, with centres reducing the proportion to the left of the centre point.

The plots below show the distributions for AS Religious Studies, comparing results for the first award of the reformed qualification against the last award of the legacy qualification. 107 centres had candidates entered at both points in time, each with 13 candidates entered on average in summer 2017.



The variation in centre-level performance over time is broadly normal and in line with what we would expect to see. The majority of centres achieved approximately the same results,

with a smaller number of centres doing better or worse. If the number of centres and candidates entering these qualifications in Wales was larger, we might see distributions that would be even closer to a standard normal distribution in shape.

We will continue to monitor centre level results during the summer 2018 series. We expect the centre level plots for the new Religious Studies A level to look similar to those observed in Summer 2017 when the new AS qualification was first awarded.

We hope that you find this additional information useful in preparation for the Committee session on 2 May.

Yours sincerely



Ann Evans
Chair



Philip Blaker
Chief Executive