

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR GCSE QUALIFICATIONS



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Contents

	<u>Page number</u>
Introduction	1
Content	2
Purpose	2
Subject Matter	2
Assessment	3
Submitting Qualifications for Approval	4
Titling	5
Awarding	5
Reporting	5

Introduction

1. This is a **Regulatory Document** under **Condition B7** of the *Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition*¹: *Compliance with Regulatory Documents*.
2. These qualification approval criteria, together with the *Interim Standard Conditions of Recognition*¹, and the subject approval criteria, set out the requirements for all new GCSE specifications approved for award in Wales from September 2017.
3. Where the subject approval criteria requirements differ from the requirements in this document, the subject approval criteria requirements will take precedence.

¹ <http://qualificationswales.org/regulation/monitoring-awarding-bodies/?lang=en&>

Content

Purpose

4. GCSE qualifications must:
 - 4.1. provide evidence of learners' achievement against challenging and relevant content;
 - 4.2. allow learners to develop a strong foundation of knowledge and skills which will support further academic and vocational study, as well as employment;
 - 4.3. provide suitable preparation for learners, to enable them to progress to a GCE AS or A Level in the same, or related, subject;
 - 4.4. where appropriate, support opportunities to develop skills that are being assessed through the Welsh Baccalaureate.

Subject matter

5. The subject matter of GCSEs must:
 - 5.1. include, where appropriate, a Welsh perspective in the content and/or assessment;
 - 5.2. provide suitable progression from the relevant programme of study at Key Stage 3;
 - 5.3. be comparable to the other Level 1 and Level 2 qualifications across the UK, and build upon the relevant programme of study at Key Stage 3;
 - 5.4. for short course specifications, include approximately half of the content of a single award GCSE;
 - 5.5. for double award specifications, include content equivalent to two separate single award GCSEs.

Assessment

6. The design of each GCSE qualification must ensure that:
 - 6.1. the level attained reflects the knowledge, skills and understanding demonstrated in the assessments and;
 - 6.2. the full grade range is accessible to learners.

7. Assessment arrangements for GCSEs must allow tiering only where there is a clear rationale to do so normally related to the nature of the subject.

8. The assessment arrangements for each GCSE qualification must:
 - 8.1. include, where appropriate, questions that require learners to produce extended written responses and demonstrate the quality of their written communication, including appropriate use of punctuation and grammar;
 - 8.2. be of comparable demand for all candidates, including where there are optional assessment units or optional examination questions;
 - 8.3. use non-examination² assessment only where it is the most appropriate method of assessing content and is permitted by the subject approval criteria.

9. The assessment arrangements for GCSE may be linear or unitised as detailed in subject approval criteria.

10. Linear GCSEs must:
 - 10.1. ensure all assessments are taken at the end of the course;
 - 10.2. set out the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment components;
 - 10.3. show the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective and to each component;
 - 10.4. require, across assessment components, a variety of question types and tasks;

² In this document and in the subject-level Approval criteria for GCSE qualifications, we define an ‘assessment by examination’ as one that is:

- a) set by an awarding body,
- b) designed to be taken simultaneously by all learners at a time determined by the awarding body, and
- c) taken under conditions specified by the awarding body (including conditions relating to the supervision of learners during the assessment and the duration of the assessment).

We refer to any type of assessment that does not meet this definition as ‘non-examination assessment’.

10.5. ensure that any optional assessment components or questions are comparable in demand for all learners.

11. Unitised GCSEs must:

11.1. ensure at least 40 per cent of assessment is completed at the end of the course;

11.2. set out the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment units;

11.3. show the proportion of marks allocated to each assessment objective and to each unit;

11.4. require, across units, a variety of question types and tasks;

11.5. ensure that any optional units or questions are comparable in demand for all learners;

11.6. ensure that results for a unit have an operational life limited only by that of the specification;

11.7. Allow only one re-sit of an assessment unit with the better result counting towards the qualification.

12. Question types across the assessments within the GCSE qualification must provide candidates with the opportunity to:

12.1. provide a mixture of short and extended responses;

12.2. make connections between, and demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of, different elements of the subject from across the full course of study for that qualification.

13. Assessment mark schemes must:

13.1. ensure that descriptors are sufficiently objective, measurable and show clear progression across different levels;

13.2. indicate how the marks available for each assessment question or task relate to the assessment objective(s).

Submitting qualifications for Approval

14. When submitting a GCSE qualification to Qualifications Wales for Approval, an awarding body must provide a specification document, sample assessment materials, and an explanatory document explaining the rationale for the key design features of the proposed qualification (rationale document). The purpose of the rationale document is to support the qualification review and Approval process and is not intended for publication.

15. The rationale document must include an explanation for:

- 15.1. the qualification structure, explaining the reasons for the way in which the content has been structured;
- 15.2. the qualification content (where this is not prescribed by the approval criteria document); for example, where specific topics, texts or authors have been included, an explanation of how and why these have been selected;
- 15.3. how the requirement for including a Welsh perspective has been met and how the approach taken is appropriate to the subject;
- 15.4. the assessment structure, including the number, weighting, mark allocation and duration of assessment units / components;
- 15.5. how the spread of assessment objectives across and within the assessment questions was determined;
- 15.6. the design of sample assessment materials, including the type and range of assessment tasks included in each component and their relationship to the assessment objectives;
- 15.7. the design and application of mark schemes.

Titling

16. The titles of GCSEs must:

- 16.1. use the word 'GCSE' for single award GCSEs;
- 16.2. use the words 'GCSE (short course)' if based on a short course specification;
- 16.3. use the words 'GCSE (double award)' if equivalent to two separate GCSEs.

Awarding

17. If a GCSE short course is awarded this cannot be used towards the award of a GCSE full course.

Reporting

18. There must be arrangements for the grading and reporting of GCSEs to ensure that:

- 18.1. attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at GCSE is reported on an eight-grade scale from A* to G, where A* is the highest grade;
- 18.2. attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at GCSE is reported as Unclassified or U;
- 18.3. the grade for double award GCSEs is reported in the format A*A*, A*A, AA, AB, BB, BC, CC, CD, DD, DE, EE, EF, FF, FG, GG;

18.4. the grades on short course and double award GCSE certificates are accompanied by explanatory notes on the nature of these types of GCSE.

**Further
information**

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