

APPROVAL CRITERIA FOR GCE AS AND A LEVEL 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
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 GCE AS and A Level 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. AS and A Level qualifications must support the delivery of a challenging and relevant course of study and ensure that learners achieving them are equipped with appropriate knowledge and skills for future studies and employment.
5. AS and A Level qualifications must ensure that learners achieving them are well prepared for progression to higher level study in the same, or a related, subject.
6. AS and A Level qualifications must, where appropriate, support opportunities to develop skills that are being assessed through the Welsh Baccalaureate.

Subject matter

7. The subject matter of AS qualifications must:
 - 7.1. provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match the first year of a full A Level course of study;
 - 7.2. enable candidates to be assessed, normally by means of two assessment units which, taken together, will have a total weight of 40 per cent of the full A Level;
 - 7.3. include, where appropriate, a Welsh perspective in the content and/or assessment;
 - 7.4. ensure suitable progression from the relevant programme of study at Key Stage 4;
 - 7.5. ensure learners achieving the qualification are well prepared for progression to A2 units of work in the same subject;
 - 7.6. ensure that the level of demand is broadly equivalent to other AS qualifications in the UK.
8. The subject matter for A2 assessments, which when combined with AS assessments will lead to the award of a full A Level, must:
 - 8.1. provide an appropriate balance of knowledge, skills and understanding to match approximately the second half of a full A Level course of study;
 - 8.2. enable candidates to be assessed, normally by means of two assessment units which, taken together, will have a total weight of 60 per cent of the A Level;
 - 8.3. include, where appropriate, a Welsh perspective in the content and/or assessment;

- 8.4. require learners to make connections between different areas of knowledge and/or understanding from across the AS and A2 course content;
- 8.5. ensure that the level of demand is broadly equivalent to other A Level qualifications in the UK.

Assessment

9. The design of each AS and A Level qualification must ensure that:
 - 9.1. the level attained reflects the knowledge, skills and understanding demonstrated in the assessments and;
 - 9.2. the full grade range is accessible to learners.

10. The assessment arrangements for AS and A Level must:
 - 10.1. offer candidates the opportunity to be assessed at the end of both AS and A Level, but only during the summer assessment period;
 - 10.2. ensure that the AS assessment contributes 40 per cent to the full A Level and the A2 assessment contributes 60 per cent to the full A Level;
 - 10.3. set out the relationship between the assessment objectives and the assessment units and tasks;
 - 10.4. include questions or tasks which allow learners to 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; at A2 this includes drawing together elements from AS and A2 course content;
 - 10.5. include questions or tasks that give learners opportunities to demonstrate their ability to:
 - 10.5.1. integrate and apply their knowledge, understanding and skills across different aspects of the subject;
 - 10.5.2. construct a response that develops a sustained line of reasoning, is coherent, relevant, comprehensive and logically structured.
 - 10.6. 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;
 - 10.7. be of comparable demand for all candidates, including where there are optional assessment units or optional examination questions;

- 10.8. use non-examination assessment² only where it is the most appropriate method of assessing content and is permitted by the subject approval criteria.
- 10.9. Allow only one re-sit of an assessment unit with the better result counting towards the qualification.

11. Assessment mark schemes must:

- 11.1. ensure descriptors are sufficiently objective, measurable and show clear progression across different levels;
- 11.2. indicate how the marks available for each assessment question or task relate to the assessment objective(s).

Submitting qualifications for Approval

12. When submitting AS and A Level 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.

13. The rationale document must include an explanation for:

- 13.1. the qualification structure, explaining the reasons for the way in which the content has been structured;
- 13.2. 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;
- 13.3. how the requirement for including a Welsh perspective has been met and how the approach taken is appropriate to the subject;
- 13.4. the assessment structure, including the number, weighting, mark allocation and duration of assessment units / components;
- 13.5. how the spread of assessment objectives across and within the assessment questions was determined;

² In this document and in the subject-level Approval criteria for GCE AS and A Level 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'.

- 13.6. 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;
- 13.7. the design and application of mark schemes.

Titling

14. The titles of AS and A Level qualifications must use the words 'GCE AS' or 'GCE A Level'.

Reporting

15. There must be arrangements for the grading and reporting of GCE AS and A Level qualifications to ensure that:
 - 15.1. attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at AS Level is reported on a five-grade scale from A to E, where A is the highest grade;
 - 15.2. attainment that is sufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at A Level is reported on a six-grade scale from A* to E, where A* is the highest grade;
 - 15.3. attainment that is insufficient to lead to the award of a certificate at AS or A Level is reported as Unclassified or U.

**Further
information**

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