



# **Principles governing the use of exemptions for the January and June 2009 series of GCSE, GCE and Entry Level examinations**



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## **Introduction**

This document has been agreed by the qualification regulators in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and the general qualifications awarding bodies. It is intended to support the process used by awarding bodies for exemptions in the January and June 2009 GCSE, GCE and entry level examinations. It will be used as a basis for further discussions with relevant interest groups about access arrangements.

An exemption is defined as an agreement by an awarding body, in advance of a candidate sitting the examination, that the candidate is to be allowed not to take a component (or components)<sup>1</sup>. When an exemption has been granted the candidate's performance on the components taken will be considered to be the performance on the full examination and an indication to this effect placed on the certificate.\*

## **Overarching objectives**

There are three high level objectives that should be applied:

1. Exemptions, as a form of access arrangement, are designed to compensate disabled candidates for skills they are unable to demonstrate to allow them to achieve qualifications based on the skills which they can demonstrate;
2. Any access arrangement adopted should not undermine the integrity of the qualification or the qualification system;
3. Exemptions are a reasonable adjustment, granted as a last resort. Every effort should be made to find access arrangements that allow the candidate to participate in the whole examination.

## **Governing principles**

1. Exemptions will be applicable to all GCSE, GCE and entry level subjects.
2. In considering applications for exemptions awarding bodies will ensure that candidates are no worse off under the current arrangements than they would have been under earlier arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup>The GCSE, GCE Code of Practice defines a component as 'A discrete assessable element within a qualification which is not itself formally reported'.

\* See attached extract from the November 2008 regulations for a full definition of exemptions.

3. Exemptions should apply only to those whole components where the candidate's disability means that s/he cannot meet any of the assessment requirements within the component.
4. Normally no more than 50% of a subject may be exempted. At A level at least one A2 unit must be completed.

### **Future work**

1. These principles will be kept under review and the number and nature of exemptions applied for and awarded will be closely monitored.
2. Examinations must be designed so as to enhance candidates' ability to access the examination. Criteria will be closely monitored to ensure there are no unnecessary barriers and examinations themselves will be kept under review. The range of examinations on offer will be considered as will the nature of support available for candidates.
3. Certificates should be designed to show what candidates have achieved. The awarding bodies and the regulators will work together to agree a specification for certificate design that will allow display of positive achievement.

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## **Extracts from regulations**

### **The Disability Discrimination (General Qualifications Bodies) (Relevant Qualifications, Reasonable Steps and Physical Features) Regulations 2007**

These Regulations specify the qualifications in respect of which it is unlawful for a general qualifications body to discriminate against a disabled person.

The Regulations state that the granting of an exemption from one or more component of an assessment or examination leading to the award of a relevant qualification in the circumstances specified is a reasonable step to take.

### **The Disability Discrimination (General Qualifications Bodies) (Relevant Qualifications, Reasonable Steps and Physical Features) (Amendment) Regulations 2008**

These Regulations specify that it is always a reasonable step for a general qualifications body to assess a disabled candidate in relation to the components of an examination taken by that candidate as if those components comprised the entire examination.