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Principles Governing the Use of Exemptions for GCSE, GCE and Entry Level Qualifications

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Contents

Introduction.....	2
Overarching objectives.....	2
Governing principles.....	3
Future work	3
Extracts from regulations.....	4

Introduction

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

An exemption is an agreement reached by an awarding organisation, in advance of an examination and/or controlled assessment, where the disabled learner is allowed not to take a component (or components).¹ When an exemption is granted, the learner's performance on the components actually taken will be considered to be the performance on the whole qualification. An indication will be placed on the learner's certificate to show that not all of the assessment objectives were accessible.²

Overarching objectives

There are three high level objectives that should be applied:

1. Exemptions are designed to recognise that there are certain learners who, because of disability, may not be able to demonstrate all of the skills required within an assessment. Therefore, exemptions enable disabled learners to gain recognition for parts of the assessment that they cannot access.
2. Any access arrangement adopted should not undermine the integrity of the qualification or the qualification system.
3. Exemptions are granted as a last resort when no other access arrangement(s) can be used. Every effort should be made to identify access arrangements that allow the learner to participate in the assessment of all parts of the qualification.

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

² See attached extract from the November 2008 regulations for a full definition of exemptions.

Governing principles

1. Exemptions will be applicable to all GCSE, GCE and Entry level qualifications.
2. In considering applications for exemptions awarding organisations will ensure that learners are no worse off under revised arrangements than they would have been under previous arrangements.
3. Exemptions must apply only to those whole components within a qualification where the learner's disability means that s/he cannot access any of the assessment requirements within the component.
4. Normally no more than 50% of a qualification 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 learners' 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 learners.
3. Certificates should be designed to show what learners have achieved. The awarding organisations and the regulators will work together to agree a specification for certificate design that will allow display of positive achievement.

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 learner in relation to the components of an examination taken by that learner as if those components comprised the entire examination.

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Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation
Spring Place
Coventry Business Park
Herald Avenue
Coventry CV5 6UB
Telephone 0300 303 3344
Textphone 0300 303 3345
Helpline 0300 303 3346

www.ofqual.gov.uk