

News story: Strengthening vocational and technical qualifications

Ofqual is today (Wednesday 12 December) publishing [research](#) that identifies evidence of grade inflation associated with internal assessment in some 'older style' Applied General qualifications.

The research shows that over time, there has been a significant increase in the number of students securing the top grades in some qualifications, which has not been matched by students' prior attainment or their subsequent degree or employment outcomes.

As such, Ofqual is calling on awarding organisations to act on the findings of today's report to address the risk of grade inflation in these legacy qualifications.

More generally, and recognising the important role that this group of qualifications plays in both widening participation in higher education and as a route into employment, Ofqual believes there is a need for awarding organisations to consider how best to strengthen their controls around internal assessment across a wide range of technical and vocational qualifications.

Phil Beach, Executive Director for Vocational and Technical Qualifications, said:

As the regulator, our primary role is to maintain the integrity of standards in qualifications, and wherever we find evidence that this may be threatened, it's important that we step in. This research shows that there are unwarranted increases in results in some of the 'older style' Applied General qualifications, and this has the potential to undermine public confidence and devalue the achievements of students. Although the Department for Education has indicated its intention to review these qualifications, we must take appropriate steps to manage the potential for grade inflation while they remain in use.

We are therefore calling on awarding organisations to strengthen their controls on internal assessment in any qualification where there are potential risks to standards. We will also be considering whether additional bespoke guidance or additional regulatory requirements are required to ensure qualification standards are maintained.

Bill Watkin, CEO, Sixth Form Colleges Association, said:

This report makes clear that there are great differences between

the old and new versions of the Applied General qualifications.

The new version is more rigorous and demanding, and, like A level, it has an examination component. It is considerably harder for students to get the top grades in them, but it is quite right that more and more sixth forms – in schools and colleges – are choosing them. They prepare young people for the workplace and for university, they represent an essential pathway for students to acquire skills that our economy and society desperately need, and they provide the kind of stretch and challenge that are needed to engage and motivate young people to be aspirational and successful. The new version should ensure the continued opportunity to study applied general qualifications which are critical for students, for the acquisition of skills essential for the workplace and higher education, and for social mobility and widening participation. If the old version is to be discontinued after the government's review, as seems likely, students, colleges and schools will need reassurances that their remaining concerns about the new version have been addressed.