

# News story: Distinguishing between marking errors and differences of opinion

Ofqual has today (27 July 2017) published [research](#) that shows examiners were able to distinguish between marking errors and legitimate differences of opinion when conducting reviews of marking last summer. The analysis follows the introduction of new rules in 2016 to ensure reviewers only change marks when there is an error, and ensure fairness for all students.

Data published today shows that marks were unchanged following a review in more than half of cases requested by schools and colleges in 2016. Analysis of a sample of cases where marks were changed, including some of the most difficult cases to judge, reveals that examiners acted consistently with the new rules in a clear majority of cases, such that only marking errors were corrected. In a small number of cases a change was made even though there was no error in the original marking, and in a very small number of cases errors were not corrected. The reasons for this, including unusual responses, examiner error and mark schemes, are discussed further in the report.

Commenting on today's publications, Sally Collier, Chief Regulator said: "It is pleasing to see that our new rules were used in many cases in the way we intended last summer. There will always be a period of adjustment following any change, and we are working with exam boards to identify what can be done this year to be even more confident that students are getting the results their performance deserves.

"Of course, the first best solution remains for original marking to be as good as it can be. Our findings provide some useful information here too, and we believe that improvements are being made through the comprehensive redesign and introduction of new GCSEs and A levels."

New data have also been published today that show the extent of mark and grade changes in 2016 resulting from reviews of marking and moderation by subject and centre-type. These show that the incidence and extent of mark and grade changes varied by subject, explained by factors including the degree of non-exam assessment, structure of the qualification or nature of the assessment (objective vs subjective).

A further piece of research, also published today, provides an insight into the approaches of exam board moderators when considering centre-marked assessments. It identifies several areas for improvement, including factors that may influence their decisions. However, overall, the evidence is of consistency in their approaches to moderation.

The 4 documents published today are:

1. [‘Evaluation of Reviews of Marking and Moderation 2016: Study and survey’](#)
2. [‘Reviews of marking and moderation resulting in grade changes of 2 grades or more: Summer 2016 examination series’](#)
3. [‘An exploratory investigation into how moderators of non-examined assessments make their judgements’](#)
4. [‘Reviews of marking and moderation: subject level analyses’](#)

## Background

Ofqual is introducing changes to the systems schools and colleges use to challenge GCSE, AS and A level results in England to make them clearer, more consistent, and fairer for all students.

Among [several reforms in summer 2016](#) we changed the rules so that mark changes would only be permitted where there was a marking error. This reflected earlier research that showed inconsistency in how marks were being reviewed, giving those who requested a review an unfair advantage.

In [spring 2017](#), we announced that we would in future give schools and colleges a second opportunity to challenge GCSE, AS level, A level and project results if they continue to have concerns about marking or moderation errors. This adds to their existing right to appeal results on the grounds that an exam board hasn't followed its own procedures.

---

## [News story: Migration Advisory Committee \(MAC\) commissioned by government](#)

The Home Office has today commissioned the Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) to report on the impact on the UK labour market of the UK's exit from the European Union and how the UK's immigration system should be aligned with a modern industrial strategy.

Responding to the commission the Chair of the MAC, Professor Alan Manning, said:

This is an important and extensive commission and the MAC welcome the opportunity to contribute to the UK's knowledge base in this

area at this critical time.

The MAC will research and analyse the areas covered by the questions using all available data sources, using both internal and external analysts and expertise.

We are keen to work with stakeholders to explore the issues encompassed by this commission and will shortly produce a call for evidence setting out how stakeholders can get involved.

The Migration Advisory Committee (MAC) is an independent public body that provides transparent, independent and evidence-based advice to the government on migration issues.

The government has set a deadline of September 2018 to report back on the commission. The MAC will consider producing interim responses for the government to ensure the report can support policy development

In the next few weeks the MAC will produce a call for evidence, which will be available on the MAC website. The MAC will engage with government, business, trade unions and other interested parties to ensure a high quality evidence based response to the commission.

---

## **[Press release: CMA welcomes Airbnb guest review changes](#)**

As part of its ongoing work in relation to online reviews the Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) became aware that people who had arrived at a property, but chose not to stay there when they saw it, were unable to leave reviews through the automatic system. Reviews could only be left with the assistance of Airbnb's customer services department. This could include customers who had left early because they were unhappy with the property or the host.

Following enquiries by the CMA, Airbnb Ireland UC ('Airbnb') offered to change its reviews system and has given the CMA a commitment to do this by 31 August 2017.

Guests will now be able to leave feedback with important information, such as the suitability of the host or the accommodation, or the reason they chose not to stay (or to cut short their stay), regardless of whether they cancelled on the day of check-in or during their visit.

The CMA welcomes Airbnb's cooperation and the company's prompt action and commitment to making improvements to its system.

Gordon Ashworth, CMA Project Director, said:

Airbnb is a popular platform used by people searching for accommodation, and the online reviews and opinions left by other guests are an important source of information.

It's therefore imperative that customers are able to access the complete picture about a property they are considering booking.

We were concerned that, if someone cut short their stay, it was too hard for them to leave a review under Airbnb's existing reviews system and so we are pleased that Airbnb engaged constructively with us and committed to making the necessary changes.

## Notes for editors

1. The CMA is the UK's primary competition and consumer authority. It is an independent non-ministerial government department with responsibility for carrying out investigations into mergers, markets and the regulated industries and enforcing competition and consumer law. For more information see the CMA's [homepage](#) on GOV.UK.
  2. This work comes as a result of CMA work into [online reviews and endorsements](#), including a call for information in 2015.
  3. The CMA considers that review sites should publish genuine reviews, including negative reviews, provided they are genuine, lawful and relevant. Failure to publish genuine reviews may breach consumer protection legislation, in particular the Consumer Protection from Unfair Trading Regulations 2008 (CPRs). Only a court can decide whether a particular practice breaks the law.
  4. Airbnb has cooperated fully with the CMA's enquiries into how its review system operates in relation to this issue. The provision of undertakings by Airbnb is not an admission of a breach of the law.
  5. The changes to Airbnb's system will go live no later than 31 August. For CMA updates, follow us on [Facebook](#), Twitter [@CMAgovuk](#), [Youtube](#) and [LinkedIn](#).
  6. Enquiries should be directed to [press@cma.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:press@cma.gsi.gov.uk) or 020 3738 6633.
-

## [Press release: Applications to re-permit Brockham oilfield](#)

The Environment Agency has received 2 applications for environmental permits at the Brockham oil and gas site in Surrey.

These applications have been submitted by the site operator to bring the site into line with the current regulations for conventional oil and gas sites. This is part of the Environment Agency's review of all oil and gas permits granted prior to October 2013.

In deciding whether or not to issue the permits, the Environment Agency will take into account all relevant considerations and legal requirements.

You can view and comment on the [applications](#).

An Environment Agency spokesperson said:

An environmental permit sets out stringent conditions that a site must adhere to. We will not issue or vary an environmental permit for a site if we consider that activities taking place will cause significant pollution to the environment or harm to human health.

We are in the process of determining the applications to re-permit this site and we want to hear from the public and understand peoples' views. Everybody has the chance to see what the permit may look like and to raise any additional concerns before we make any final decision.

For all media enquiries please contact 0800 141 2743 or email [Southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk](mailto:Southeastpressofficel@environment-agency.gov.uk).

---

## [News story: Working with China on agriculture challenges: more time to apply](#)

The deadline for an up to £8 million funding competition to work with Chinese partners on agritech solutions has been extended.

There's more time to apply into an up to £8 million competition to develop new technologies that solve the agricultural challenges facing China.

The competition has been extended until 20 September 2017 to give interested applicants in the UK and China the time they need to find collaborators and form strong partnerships.

This is being jointly funded by Innovate UK and Biotechnology and [Biological Sciences Research Council](#) (BBSRC) in the UK, and the [Ministry of Science and Technology](#) (MoST) in China. It is part of the [Newton Fund](#), which promotes economic development and social welfare of official development assistance (ODA) partner countries.

## What we're looking for

We're encouraging projects in 3 areas:

- precision agriculture, agriculture digitisation and decision management tools
- sustainable agricultural production
- agricultural products processing

## Competition information

- Registrations are now open until 13 September, with final applications expected by midday on 20 September
- we expect projects to range in size up to £2 million and to last up to 3 years
- all projects must involve at least one UK business, one UK higher education or research council institute, one Chinese business and one Chinese academic institution
- work must be carried out either entirely in China, or in both China and the UK
- you could attract up to 70% of your project costs