

Reliability programme

'There's a broad expectation that assessment should be absolutely perfect and accurate, that a mark of 50 is a mark of 50, regardless of who marks, the time at which it is marked and so on. We need to explore whether that sort of expectation is well founded, or whether within the system there are some trade-offs between absolute reliability of that nature and the validity of the way in which we go about assessment.'

Ofqual Chair Kathleen Tattersall

What is Ofqual's reliability programme?

When Ofqual launched in May 2008, we pledged to carry out a 'health check' on the reliability of qualification, examination and test results. This health check – called the reliability programme – is now underway.

What is reliability?

Confidence in qualifications, exams and tests is based on results being fair, comparable, valid and reliable. By 'reliable' we mean satisfying questions such as whether a student would have received the same result if he or she happened to take a different version of the exam. What if the student took the exam on a different day, or with

a different examiner marking the paper? We want to understand more about these factors and how they affect a learner's final result.

What will the reliability programme achieve?

The project will last two years. Over this time we aim to find out more about the reliability of results. This will be the first major exploration into this area by a regulator. We also want to open the discussion with our stakeholders, including students, teachers, schools, colleges and parents. By the end of the project, we want to understand more about the reliability of results and what this means to the public.



Why is reliability important?

Examination and test results can have a huge impact on people's lives. They are the pieces of paper learners take from school to university and workplace; we must be able to depend on them.

How will we look at reliability?

The reliability programme is made up of three strands. Strand one focuses on generating evidence on the reliability of results from our national qualifications, examinations and tests. Strand two involves interpreting and communicating that evidence. Strand three aims to develop a policy on reliability.

So far we have appointed our technical advisory group. The six-strong group is made up

of educational experts, including members of awarding organisation research teams, testing agencies and university researchers. With them, we are creating a methodology for the programme and determining which qualifications, examinations and tests to look at. This could be GCSEs, A levels, national curriculum tests or professional qualifications.

We are also asking questions on reliability in our annual survey, run by Ipsos MORI, which will be published in early 2009. Teachers, learners and the general public will take part in the survey. This will be followed by workshops. Through these, we hope to gain a snapshot of the public's perception of reliability.

How will the reliability programme benefit the learner?

This work will provide us with a better understanding of reliability, meaning we can develop our own policy. The policy might, for instance, suggest changes to the way that results are presented, to highlight reliability issues more clearly.

How can I get involved?

Opportunities to become involved in the reliability programme will develop as the programme progresses, and we would be delighted to hear your views. For more information please email reliabilityprogramme@ofqual.gov.uk or log on to www.ofqual.gov.uk/reliabilityprogramme.



Contact information

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