

By attachment to email

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Dear Sarah

**BCS School Curriculum and Assessment Committee Response to Ofqual's
Consultation on exceptional arrangements for exam grading and assessment in 2020**

The BCS SCAC has responded to Ofqual's consultation through the online form. This letter summarises the key points made in the committee's response.

Firstly, we would like to congratulate Ofqual on your approach to this significant challenge. Qualifications are important for young people's life chances and the coherence and smooth functioning of education as a whole. The committee welcomes Ofqual's confidence in teachers' professional judgement during this extraordinary period. We recognise that Ofqual has taken a fair and pragmatic response to meeting the challenge and the requirements set out by Ministers, and are broadly content with the approach that has been developed. However, we believe GCSE Computer Science will present particular challenges.

TEACHERS' LACK OF EXPERIENCE AND ISOLATION

1. Many GCSE Computer Science teachers may be the only subject specialist in the school so will be unable to engage in collegiate discussions about standards.
2. Computer Science is a relatively new GCSE for many teachers who will lack of experience in grading. Teachers concerns over grading (whether or not they are well-founded) indicate that they are not clear on standards, so there may be inconsistencies in teacher judgement.
3. BCS/SCAC believes that the reliability of individual teachers' decisions could be improved through peer-to-peer discussions on how teachers are making those decisions, much as teachers in larger departments would discuss standards prior to inform their judgements. BCS, through its Computing At School network would be happy to facilitate this.
4. Supporting computer science teachers up front to develop their shared understanding of standards through peer-to-peer networks will help teachers make individual grading and ranking decisions more efficiently and confidently, saving them time.

ISSUES WITH USING HISTORICAL DATA

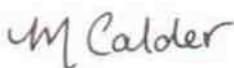
5. The rapid growth in GCSE Computer Science means that schools are expanding the cohort beyond their previous approach to recruiting candidates, sometimes relaxing entry requirements used previously (eg predicted grade in GCSE mathematics). The cohort may not be typical of past years, presenting challenges for the use of historical data nationally and at the individual school level.
6. The committee recognises that the use of historical statistical data provides the only mechanism for standardisation in the current exceptional circumstances. While this is likely to be relatively robust at a cohort level, we would have expected the Government's significant investment in the National Centre for Computing Education to have some impact on results at GCSE. However, we recognise that there is no mechanism for recognising this.
7. We have more concerns at an individual centre level, where staff turnover, increasing entry numbers, and a significant CPD programme through the NCCE will make the use of historical data less reliable. We recognise that there is no practical way of addressing this issue up front and that the issues we identify would not be picked up by reviewing a school's 'trajectory'. We anticipate that this may lead to a number of appeals, for example when a highly-experienced teacher achieving good results moves to another school with a poor track record in GCSE Computer Science.

UNFAIRNESS, APPEALS AND RESITS

8. Students from particular groups will be further disadvantaged by the current crisis. Candidates at the grade 3-4 borderline need special consideration given the academic history of the subject.
9. Unconscious bias is as much as a problem than with any other subject. However, with the significant number of CAT5/6 schools not offering GCSE Computer Science and the historical misconceptions around gender may play a larger part in computer science than other subjects. However, there is no realistic method to compensate for this at scale. This supports the case for peer to peer discussion of standards and evidence.
10. The committee feels that particular attention should be paid to the borderline between grades 3 and 4 as historically GCSE Computer Science was offered primarily to higher achieving candidates.
11. For the reasons identified earlier we anticipate a number of appeals. We very strongly support a 'simplified appeals process' that minimises the burden on schools. We also recommend that Ofqual considers the affordability of autumn resits given the likely numbers of appeals.

As always, we would be delighted to discuss these issues with you, though we recognise the immense pressures facing Ofqual will impact on your ability to hold one-to-one discussions.

Yours sincerely



Professor Muffy Calder OBE FEng FRSE
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