

What does Ofqual's Condition G4 mean for awarding bodies in the UK?

The rules and regulations surrounding teacher involvement in exam development

Background

In May 2018 Ofqual ran a technical consultation on its proposals for new and revised conditions and guidance intended to strengthen the safeguards when teachers are involved in developing confidential assessment materials.

Following this consultation, Ofqual decided to implement its proposed changes in full, with only minor changes being made to improve the clarity and consistency of the updated conditions and guidance.

What changed?

Since July 2018, additional guidance has been available relating to the safeguarding of confidentiality where teachers are involved in developing assessments.

In this guidance Ofqual recognise that there are clear benefits for awarding organisations in involving practising teachers in the development of assessments, but that doing so also introduces some additional risks to confidentiality that need to be managed.

How significant these risks are, and what level of safeguards are necessary will depend upon:

- The nature and amount of confidential assessment information held by a teacher
- The teacher's role in delivering qualifications
- Potential pressures on teachers to misuse confidential assessment information
- The impact if confidential assessment information is misused

For high stakes qualifications and assessments for which there is a pre-determined results date, the impact of a breach is likely to be very significant. Therefore the level of safeguards that an awarding organisation needs to have in operation are expected to reflect this.

These safeguards should also have an appropriate balance between up-front measures to **prevent or mitigate a breach** and end-point measures to quickly **identify and mitigate any disclosure** that does occur.

What should awarding organisations do to safeguard the development of assessments?

Two potential actions that an awarding organisation could take to reduce the up-front risk of a breach identified by Ofqual in their guidance are:

- Don't involve any practising teachers in the development of live assessment materials
- Ensure that any practising teachers involved in the development of live assessment materials do not teach the relevant qualification(s)

However, both of these approaches would introduce potentially significant additional limitations upon an awarding organisations' ability to contract a sufficient number of appropriately skilled and experienced individuals to enable them to continue to develop high-quality and reliable assessments in the future.

Instead, Ofqual identify a third, less restrictive but still effective measure:

- Ensure that no practising teacher knows whether or when the assessment materials they have been involved in the development of will be used

How can awarding organisations make this work in practice?

There are a number of ways that the assessment production processes in operation at an awarding organisation could be changed, with some being more effective in achieving the level of unpredictability than others, for example:

- Continue to commission teachers to write and quality assure whole assessments, but ensure that a reserve of papers is maintained so that the timing of the use of any particular paper is not known during their production
- Change the way that assessment content is commissioned in order to develop an independent bank of questions that is updated based on the expected level of demand in the future and then select a subset of content from this bank each time a new live assessment is required

Of these two potential options the second will result in a more secure and less predictable production model, but will be more complex to design, implement, monitor and maintain.

How might technology help?

A growing number of awarding organisations are already choosing to invest in the use of item-banking systems to enable them to modernise and improve their assessment production processes in exactly the ways that Ofqual are suggesting in their guidance outlined above.

Not only do such systems enable them to transition from their previous annual, whole paper production model, to an approach where content is commissioned at a more granular level. They also eliminates the need for draft materials to be transferred using email, file transfer tools or by post, resulting in further improvements in both efficiency and security.

> What next?

Read the full Ofqual guidance [here](#).

Find out more about GradeMaker Pro, which is designed to help awarding bodies improve efficiency, security and quality. By delivering a secure item banking solution it helps address the requirements of Ofqual's Condition G4. To find out more, go to www.grademaker.com and book a free demo.