

# **Analysis of responses to our consultation on regulating Advanced Extension Awards**



June 2018

Ofqual/18/6379/4

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## **Executive summary**

We consulted on replacing our existing rules for Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) from 8 February to 7 March 2018. A copy of the consultation is available on our website.<sup>1</sup>

There were 11 responses to the consultation – 8 from individuals and 3 from organisations.

In the main, respondents supported our proposed approach. However, views were more mixed on our proposed approach to:

- grading;
- use of A level assessment objectives; and
- standard setting.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulating-advanced-extension-awards](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/regulating-advanced-extension-awards)

## Introduction

### Background

Advanced Extension Awards (AEAs) are qualifications taken alongside A levels, designed to stretch and challenge the most able students.

There is currently only one AEA available, in mathematics; around 700 school-age students take this qualification each year.

### About our consultation

We consulted on updating our rules for AEAs to reflect reforms to A levels in England.

Our consultation took place from 8 February 2018 to 7 March 2018. It included 14 questions, and respondents could choose to answer all or just some of the questions.

We published the consultation on our website and respondents could choose to respond using an online form, by email or by posting their answers to the consultation questions to us.

### Who responded?

We received 11 responses to our consultation – 8 from individuals and 3 from organisations. All responses were from individuals or organisations based in England or Wales.

**Table 1: Breakdown of consultation responses**

Personal / organisation response	Respondent type	Number
Personal	Teacher	6
Personal	University lecturer/other academic staff	2
Organisation	Awarding organisation	1
Organisation	Head teachers' association	1
Organisation	Charity	1

## **Approach to analysis**

Ten of the respondents structured their answers around the specific questions we asked. We have therefore chosen to present the responses to the consultation by question, in the order in which they were asked.

One respondent chose a different format for their response. We have incorporated their comments under relevant individual questions, or under 'other issues'.

For some of the questions, respondents could indicate the extent to which they agreed with our proposals, using a 5-point scale (Strongly agree, Agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Disagree and Strongly disagree). For these questions, we present the answers respondents gave using the 5-point scale as well as any more detailed comments.

## Respondents' views

In this section, we report the respondent's views and we have structured this around the consultation questions.

A consultation is not the same as a survey and the responses only reflect the views of those who chose to respond. Typically these will be those with strong views and/or particular experience or interest in a topic. What follows is a fair reflection of the views expressed by respondents to the consultation.

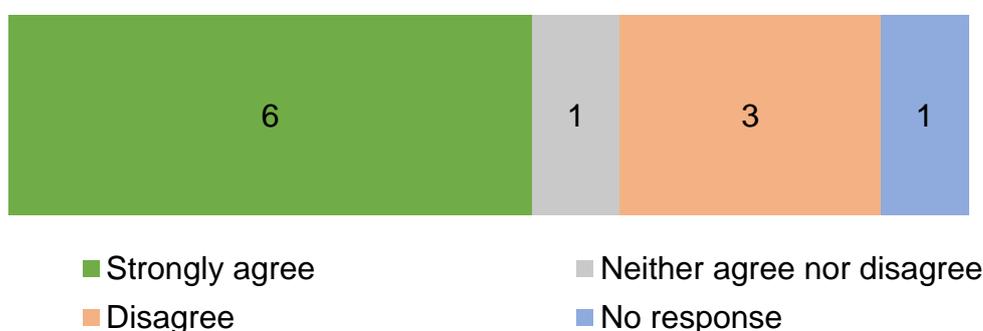
### Maintaining comparability with previous qualifications

#### Question 1

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should continue to require AEAs to be accessible to students who have taken an A level in the corresponding subject, without requiring further study or learning?

As shown in the chart below, most respondents supported this proposal, with six (five individuals, one organisation) strongly agreeing, and three (two individuals, one organisation) disagreeing with it.

Overview of responses to Question 1



Respondents who supported our proposal commented that the accessibility of AEAs to A level students was one of their key advantages compared to alternative, unregulated, assessments such as STEP. They noted this provided an option to stretch the most able students, and an opportunity to explore depth of understanding and application to new areas.

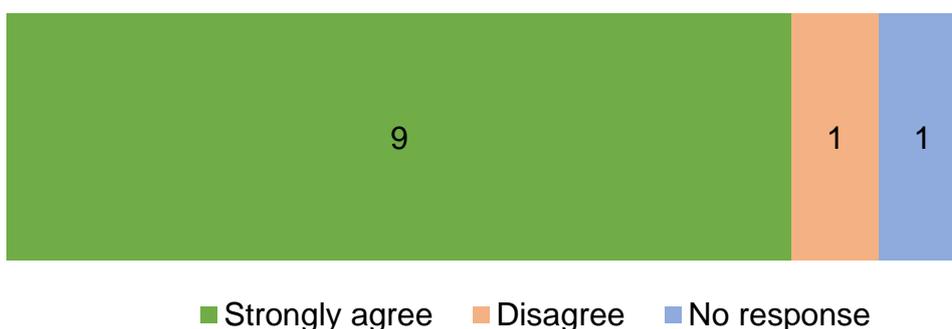
Respondents who disagreed with our proposal commented that it was unrealistic to expect students to complete an AEA without at least **some** additional study. One suggested that it might be better to be clear that students should not need to study additional content for an AEA.

## Question 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should continue to require AEAs to be more demanding than the corresponding A level, requiring students to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding?

As shown in the chart below, almost all respondents (7 individuals, 2 organisations) strongly agreed with this proposal, while only one individual disagreed.

### Overview of responses to Question 2



The respondents who agreed with our proposal said that a greater level of demand than A level was a key feature of current qualifications, and maintaining this would be essential for it to remain useful for higher education institutions. Respondents also commented that requiring students to demonstrate a greater depth of understanding, and to use what they know to solve more complex problems and create more sophisticated arguments, were aspects of the current AEAs that should be retained.

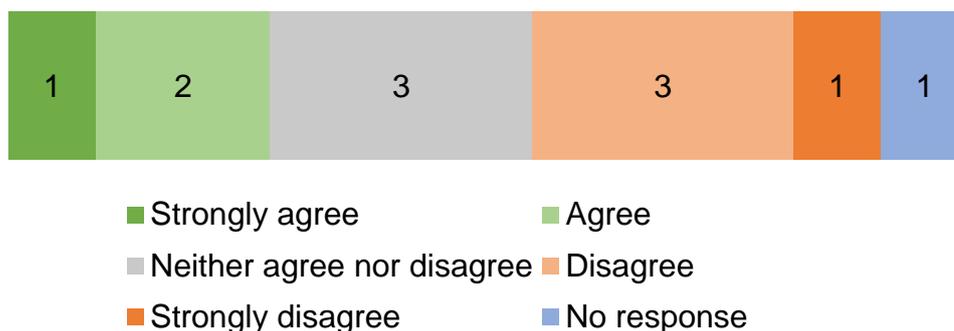
The one respondent who disagreed (an individual) commented that the current AEA provided poor preparation for university, and that a qualification which differentiated students based on their problem-solving skills might be more useful.

## Question 3

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should continue to require AEAs to have two passing grades - 'Merit' and 'Distinction'?

As shown in the chart below, views on this proposal were mixed, with three respondents (2 organisations, 1 individual) agreeing or strongly agreeing, and four (all individuals) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

### Overview of responses to Question 3



Respondents who supported our proposal commented that it would maintain comparability with the existing qualification, and that two passing grades were the right number. One (an organisation) also commented that some universities include specific AEA grades in their offers, so continuity with existing qualifications was important.

Respondents who disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with our proposals suggested that a larger range of grades would allow for more differentiation between learners, and might make the qualification relevant to a wider range of learners. Suggested alternatives included:

- adding a 'Pass' grade below 'Merit' (one individual); and
- additional grades at both the top and bottom end of the scale (one individual).

Respondents who expressed no preference commented that grading in existing qualifications had not worked well, and had failed to provide universities with a reliable means of discriminating between top end candidates. These respondents also commented that at least two passing grades should be retained, and that there may be merit in adding an additional 'Pass' grade.

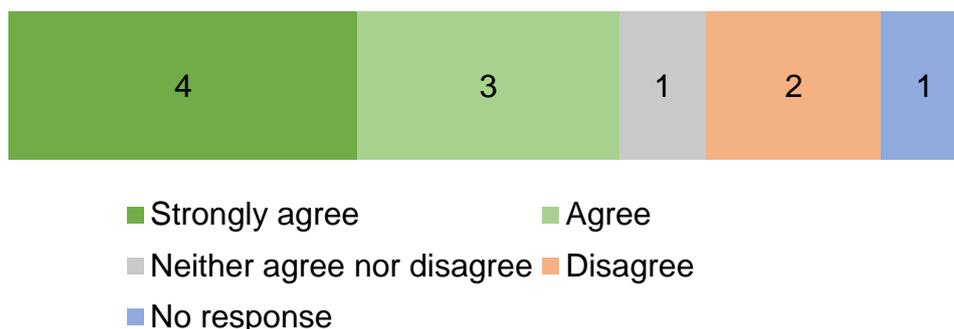
## Reflecting A level reform

### Question 4

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should only permit AEAs in subjects where there is at least one A level offered in England?

As shown in the chart below, most respondents (six individuals, one organisation) either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, and only two respondents (one organisation, one individual) disagreed.

### Overview of responses to Question 4



Respondents who supported our proposed approach commented that this was necessary if AEAs were to be based on A level content.

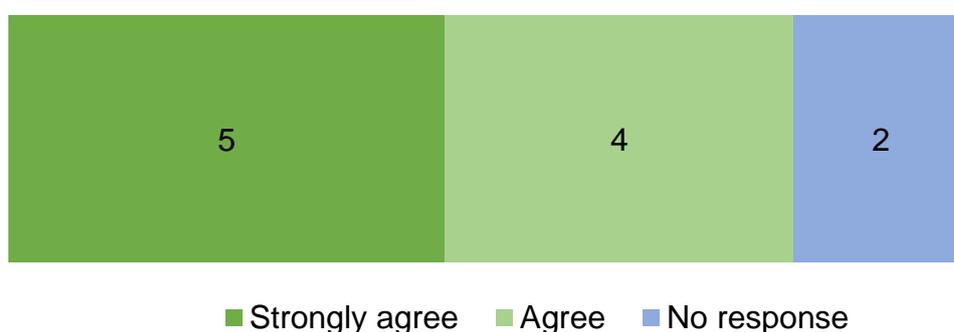
Both respondents who disagreed with our proposal commented that there might be merit in an AEA which combined content from more than one A level (for example, to give a qualification in physical sciences, or mathematics and philosophy). One (the organisation) also commented that it might be difficult to offer AEAs in some subjects (including further mathematics) which have only limited prescribed core content.

### Question 5

To what extent do you agree or disagree that future AEAs should be based on the Department for Education's subject content for the corresponding A level?

As shown in the chart below, all the respondents who answered this question (7 individuals, 2 organisations) either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal.

### Overview of responses to Question 5



Respondents commented that this was a necessary consequence of ensuring content did not range beyond A level, and important to ensure AEAs did not create additional burden on schools and remained accessible to learners.

Three respondents (1 individual, 2 organisations) also commented that more bespoke arrangements might be needed for AEAs in mathematics:

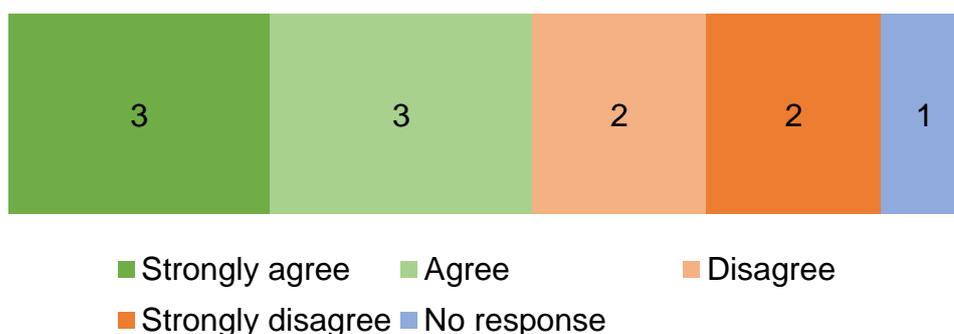
- one commented that it might be more appropriate for the AEA in mathematics to include content from both the mathematics and further mathematics A levels
- one noted that it might be difficult to set appropriate questions for some of the A level mathematics content, without making assessment unduly predictable – so it should be possible to develop an AEA that does not cover all the prescribed A level content
- one commented that it might be difficult to develop an AEA in further mathematics, as only a limited core of content is prescribed

### Question 6

To what extent do you agree or disagree that future AEAs should reflect the assessment objectives we have set for the corresponding A level, but with a greater emphasis on the skills of analysis and evaluation?

As shown in the chart below, respondents' views on this proposal were mixed, with 6 (5 individuals, 1 organisation) agreeing or strongly agreeing, and four (three individuals, one organisation) disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

### Overview of responses to Question 6



Respondents who supported our proposals commented that this was a consequence of the content not extending beyond A level, and that it was good to assess higher level skills. One respondent (an organisation) also commented that – in mathematics – a greater focus on problem-solving (rather than analysis and evaluation) was likely to be appropriate.

This view was echoed by a number of those who disagreed with our proposals. They commented that the concepts of 'analysis' and 'evaluation' are not particularly

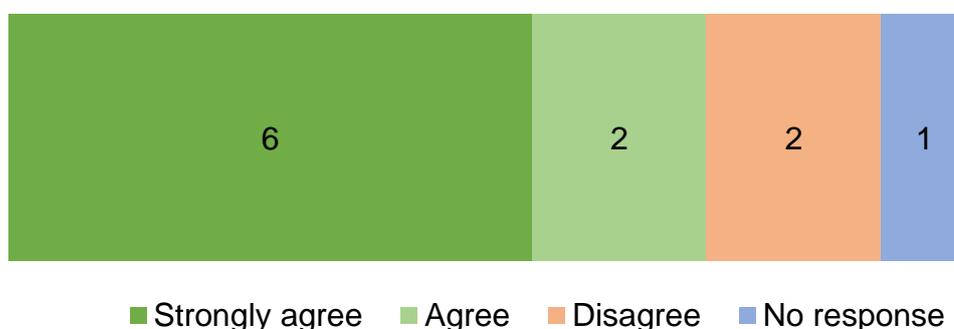
meaningful in the context of the assessment objectives for mathematics. They also suggested a greater focus on problem solving.

### Question 7

To what extent do you agree or disagree that – in line with reformed A levels – future AEsAs should use exam assessment, with non-exam assessment only used in subjects where we have expressly permitted it?

As shown in the chart below, most respondents (7 individuals, 1 organisation) either agreed or strongly agreed with this proposal, and only 2 respondents (1 individual, 1 organisation) disagreed.

Overview of responses to Question 7



Respondents who supported our proposals commented that non-exam assessment did not seem appropriate to the academic nature of AEsAs, the importance of ensuring AEsAs remain manageable for schools and colleges, and that exams should be used unless there was a good reason not to.

The two respondents who disagreed with our proposals both commented that this seemed unduly restrictive, and that non-exam assessment might be appropriate in some subjects (such as statistics or science).

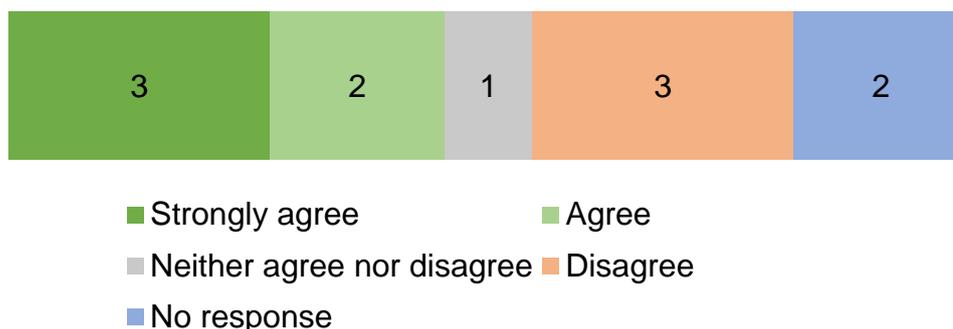
## Setting standards

### Question 8

To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should set rules for setting grade boundaries in AEsAs that require exam boards to use the same high-level approach we have adopted for reformed A levels?

As shown in the chart below, views on this proposal were mixed, with five respondents (four individuals, one organisation) agreeing or strongly agreeing, and three (two individuals, one organisation) disagreeing.

### Overview of responses to Question 8



None of the respondents who supported our proposal provided any further comments.

Respondents who disagreed commented that the small cohort size for AEAAs, as well as the increased difficulty of the qualification, might create challenges for the statistical methods used to set grade boundaries in GCSEs, AS and A levels. One respondent (an organisation) also commented that awarding organisations should be able to design assessments that used different approaches to grading, rather than simple mark-based grades.

### Our proposed rules and guidance

#### Question 9

Do you have any comments on our proposed Conditions and requirements for AEAAs?

#### Question 10

Do you have any comments on our proposed guidance for AEAAs?

Nine respondents (seven individuals, two organisations) answered 'No' to both questions.

Of the two respondents who did answer this question:

- One (the individual) commented that our qualification-level rules and guidance may need supplementing with rules and guidance at subject-level;
- One (the organisation) noted that (in addition to its comments on the substance of our proposals) it would be beneficial to require awarding organisations to give universities access to AEA scripts, as this would eliminate one of the reasons for universities setting bespoke entrance examinations.

## **Impact of our proposals**

### **Question 11**

We have not identified any material impacts (either on persons who share a protected characteristic, or more widely) which would result from our proposed changes. Are there any potential impacts we have not identified?

### **Question 12**

Are there any costs or benefits associated with our proposals which we have not identified?

### **Question 13**

Are there any additional steps we could take to mitigate any negative impacts resulting from these proposals?

### **Question 14**

Do you have any further comments on the impacts of the proposals?

Two respondents (both individuals) chose not to answer any of the questions about the impact of our proposals. A further 6 respondents (5 individuals, 1 organisation) answered 'No' to all four questions.

Only three respondents (1 individual, 2 organisations) provided any comments on the impact of our proposals.

All three commented on the increased number of universities that are using additional assessments (both AEAs and other, unregulated, assessments) as part of their admissions process for mathematics. All 3 felt this was a worrying development, which could restrict access to mathematics degrees for students from less well-resourced schools.

All three commented that one of the reasons universities take this approach is that current AEAs have not consistently met their needs. They suggested that a stronger AEA, which was better focused on what universities would want, might help reverse this trend, and promote more equal access to higher education.

## **Appendix A: List of organisational consultation respondents**

We asked respondents to indicate the capacity in which they were responding as part of their response.

Below we list those organisations that submitted a response to the consultation. We have not included a list of those responding as an individual; however all responses were given equal status in the analysis.

- ASCL
- MEI
- Pearson

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