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**УДК 378.147**

## **РЕФОРМА СИСТЕМИ ВИПУСКНИХ ЕКЗАМЕНІВ У ШКОЛАХ ВЕЛИКОЇ БРИТАНІЇ**

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У статті здійснено аналіз останніх реформ системи випускних екзаменів у старших класах середніх шкіл Великої Британії шкіл на основі змін у програмі GCSE та A-Level.

Ключові слова: загальне свідоцтво про середню освіту, загальне свідоцтво про освіту просунутого рівня, освітні реформи, ключові академічні кваліфікації.

## **РЕФОРМА СИСТЕМИ ВИПУСКНИХ ЭКЗАМЕНОВ В ШКОЛАХ ВЕЛИКОБРИТАНИИ**

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В статье осуществлен анализ последних реформ в системе выпускных экзаменов старших классов средних школ Великобритании на основе внесения изменений в программу GCSE и A-Level.

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Ключевые слова: общее свидетельство о среднем образовании, общее свидетельство об образовании на продвинутом уровне, реформы образования, ключевые академические квалификации.

## **GCSE AND A-LEVEL REFORM IN THE UNITED KINGDOM**

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The paper analyses recent education reforms in the examination system of senior forms of British schools on basis of implementing changes of GCSE and A-Level.

Keywords: GCSE, A-Level, education reforms, core academic qualifications.

British education is undergoing dramatic changes that are essential part for making famous traditional system of this country adapted to possible future challenges in our rapidly modern globalised world. The most urgent changes were designed to address the grade inflation, dumbing down and loss of rigour in GCSE qualifications, school league tables and the national curriculum. There were numerous consultations on those proposals and according to Education Secretary Michael Gove there was a consensus that the exams and qualification system had to change for it was broken. [1]

But the reform was not complete for the idea that British education system would end the competition between exam boards to offer GCSEs in core academic qualifications and it would have just one wholly new exam in each subject was postponed. So the plans to have a single exam board offering a new exam in each academic subject were considered as those that could present significant risks in trying to both strengthen qualifications and end competition in a large part of the exams market according to the exam regulator Office of Qualifications and Examinations Regulation.

Chief Regulator Glenys Stacey said: “How standards are set and maintained, in effect where we set the bar and how we hold it steady, are extremely important issues. We want to hear from students, parents, employers, higher and further education school leaders and teachers about our proposals. It is vital that people engage with these issues, as many will need to think about how they will use the new grading structure to make decisions about stu-

dents applying for work or education opportunities. And we will be working hard to help them understand the new system as 2017 approaches.”[2]

The first set of reforms concerns A-levels, the General Certificate of Education Advanced Level that is an academic qualification offered by educational bodies in the United Kingdom and the British Crown dependencies to students completing secondary or pre-university education and GCSE, an academic qualification awarded in a specified subject, generally taken in a number of subjects by students aged 14-16 in secondary education in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. Schools and universities were unhappy that constant assessment and modularisation got in the way of proper learning, so on 9 April, the Department for Education announced content changes for A-levels and GCSEs and listed the additional subjects to be reformed. The qualifications should be linear, with all assessments normally taken at the end of the course. Examinations will test extended writing in subjects such as English and history, have fewer bite-sized and overly structured questions, and in mathematics and science there should be greater emphasis on quantitative problem-solving. Internal assessments and the use of exam aids will be kept to a minimum and used only where there is a compelling case to do so, to provide for effective and deep assessment of the specified curriculum content.

Content changes for A-level subjects for first teaching 2015 include:

- 1) a strengthened mathematical and quantitative content - in Science, Computer Science, Economics and Business;
- 2) an increased emphasis on practical skills in Science
- 3) the inclusion of an ‘unseen text’ in English Literature
- 4) an increased breadth of study in History
- 5) a significant overhaul of Computer Science content.

These qualifications are currently under development and are due to be accredited by Ofqual during May and June 2014.

The A-level subjects that will be redeveloped and introduced from 2016 include:

- 1) Dance;
- 2) Drama;
- 3) Music;
- 4) Design and Technology;

5) Religious Studies;

6) PE.

In addition, Ofqual has announced the assessment and regulatory arrangements for a number of new A-level and AS qualifications. This covers:

1) assessment criteria for the new A-levels for first teaching in 2015, which are: Science, Psychology, English, Art and Design, Business, Computer Science, Economics, History and Sociology;

2) regulatory arrangements for new AS-levels. [7]

The Government announced the next steps in the reform of GCSEs and A levels where they are going to introduce more rigorous content into reformed GCSEs and A levels to be taught from September 2016 and 2015 respectively. The changes will make these qualifications more ambitious, with greater stretch for the most able; will prepare young people better for the demands of employment and further study; will address the pernicious damage caused by grade inflation and dumbing down, which have undermined students' achievements for far too long; and will give pupils, parents, teachers, universities and employers greater confidence in the integrity and reliability of our qualifications system. [8]

Importantly, the new GCSEs will be universal qualifications and the Government expects the same proportion of pupils to sit them as now. However, reformed GCSEs will no longer set an artificial cap on how much pupils can achieve by forcing students to choose between higher and foundation tiers. Reformed GCSEs should allow students to access any grade while enabling high-quality assessment at all levels. The appropriate approach to assessment will vary between subjects, and a range of solutions may come forward – for example, extension papers offering access to higher grades alongside a common core. There should be no disincentive (something which discourages) for schools to give an open choice of papers to their pupils.

Based on the advice of the A level content advisory board established by the Russell Group of leading universities, Education Secretary Michael Gove has also already announced that A levels in mathematics, languages and geography will be reformed for first teaching from September 2016. Although the Government postponed the changes of GCSEs and A levels in

religious studies, design and technology, drama, dance, music and PE - and GCSEs in art and design, computer science and citizenship. Michael Gove said that they would also be reformed and brought up to these new, higher standards for first teaching at the same time, in September 2016. [8]

All the reforms to GCSEs and A levels complement the changes that the Government have already made to technical and vocational qualifications, removing those which are not endorsed by businesses or employer bodies from league tables, and leaving only those which represent real achievement.

The second set of reforms concerned vocational qualifications that became less rigorous options under the Labour Government as well as currency of apprenticeships that was devalued alongside every other qualification. The Wolf report and the Richard report on apprenticeship reform outlined how to improve the quality of education and expand work experience. [3]

The Wolf Report pays special attention to the improvement of vocational education for 14- to 19-year-olds encouraging successful progression into the labour market and into higher level education and training routes. The report also provides practical recommendations to help inform future policy direction, taking into account current financial constraints. The report distinguishes very clear organising principles for reform:

- 1) any young person's programme of study, whether 'academic' or 'vocational', should provide for labour market and educational progress;
- 2) young people should have accurate and useful information, so that they can make decisions accordingly;
- 3) the system needs to be simplified dramatically, as a precondition for giving people good and accurate information, to free up resources for teaching and learning, and to encourage innovation and efficiency. [4]

The Richard report tries to redefine apprenticeships and focuses with greater rigour on the outcome of an apprenticeship, using recognised industry standards to form the basis of every apprenticeship. It also recommends ensuring that all apprentices reach a good level in English and maths before they can complete their apprenticeship, creating the right incentives for apprenticeship training through government funding, and encouraging greater diversity and innovation in training. [5]

Minister for Schools from May 2005 until October 2008 Andrew Adonis has explained so powerfully talking on apprenticeship reform: “We have a big, big problem in England, it’s now clear to me, of far too few youth apprenticeships and very poor quality. People talk about the private sector as being the cause of this problem but it’s now clear to me that the public sector is a big cause of this problem too and until the Government itself takes the lead in creating apprenticeships as an employer – and the largest employer in the country at that - it cannot expect the private sector to follow it.” [6]

Taken together, these changes mean that every young person in this country will have the opportunity to study high-quality, rigorous, demanding qualifications across the academic and vocational curriculum from September 2016 onwards.

These changes will increase the rigour of qualifications, strengthening the respect in which they are held by employers and universities alike. Young people in England deserve world-class qualifications and a world-class education - and that is what our reforms will deliver. With sharper accountability, a more ambitious curriculum and world-class qualifications, as Michael Gove said: “We can create an education system that can compete with the best in the world—a system that gives every young person, regardless of background, the high-quality education, high aspirations and high achievement they need and deserve.” [9]

The new reforms bring in the further changes that are needed if GCSEs are to become more engaging and worthwhile to teach and study, as well as more resilient and respected. As well as being better qualifications from a standards point of view to prepare young people better for the next steps in their education or employment in years to come.

The reforms are expected to make sure that employers, colleges and universities, who use GCSEs when making selection decisions, can have confidence in the value of the qualifications they are using that the changes that are made take into account the pressures placed on qualifications when they provide a basis for schools to be held accountable for the performance of their students.