STATUTORY GUIDANCE

Autumn 2020 Data Exchange Procedures

AS and A level qualifications (GCE)

ofqual

Contents

Autumn 2020 Data Exchange Procedures – AS and A level

The following procedures outline the approach that must be taken by awarding organisations to setting specified levels of attainment ("awarding"), and the data that must be provided during the autumn 2020 data exchange, for AS and A level qualifications. Further information will be published separately in relation to GCSE Qualifications.

The requirements in this document apply to pre and post-reform GCE qualifications. This is a **Regulatory Document** under **Condition B7** of the General Conditions of Recognition[1] (October 2020): Compliance with Regulatory Documents.

In addition –

a) in relation to pre-reform GCE qualifications, this document sets requirements under Condition GCE(Pre-reform)2.1 of the Pre-reform GCE Qualification Level Conditions[2]; and

b) in relation to post-reform GCE Qualifications, this document sets requirements under Condition GCE3.1 and GCE9.1 of the GCE Qualification Level Conditions[3].

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[1] https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook

[2] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-for-pre-reform-qualifications

[3] https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gce-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements

Awarding requirements – AS and A level[4]

The entries for AS and A level qualifications in the autumn 2020 series are low relative to the overall cohort that would typically enter in a summer series.[5] Given this, and the likelihood that the entries will not be representative of the overall cohort that typically enter in a summer series, statistical predictions will not be used to guide the awards. Awarding will therefore be based on examiner judgement, supported by other available sources of evidence.

The requirements outlined below apply to the awarding of all AS and A level qualifications in the autumn 2020 series.

Approach to awarding – reformed qualifications

An awarding organisation must ensure that persons involved in the setting of specified levels of attainment for its GCE Qualifications in the autumn 2020 series ("awarders") are adequately briefed in line with the requirements set out below and the 'Briefing document for awarders' prepared by Ofqual.

An awarding organisation must adhere to the following requirements in its approach to awarding in autumn 2020 for each GCE Qualification which it makes available –

(a) Awarding for the autumn 2020 series must be based on examiner judgement and the statistical predictions normally used in awarding the qualification in other series will not be used.

(b) The autumn 2020 series is to be conceptualised as a continuation of the summer 2020 series. As such, to ensure fairness to Learners, awarding must seek alignment, as far as possible, with the level of attainment that would typically have been required to achieve the outcomes observed in summer 2020 – noting that, due to differences in the cohorts, the actual cumulative percentage outcomes at each specified level of attainment ("grade") will likely differ relative to those in summer 2020.

(c) The performance standard demonstrated by Learners taking the relevant qualification in previous years (as demonstrated by the archive scripts on the grade boundaries from previous years) is not to be used

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[4] Note that these principles refer to the Autumn series for AS and A level. Further information will be published separately relating to GCSEs in the Autumn and November series.

[5] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/entries-for-as-and-a-level-autumn-2020-exam-series

as a basis for awarding in the autumn 2020 series. Rather, an awarding organisation must set standards specific to this exceptional autumn series. When setting this standard, the awarding organisation must ensure that the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners at the recommended grade boundaries is sufficient to maintain public confidence in the qualification – bearing in mind the unusual context of the autumn series, the desire to align as far as possible with summer 2020, and the guidance provided in this document.

(d) The primary source of evidence to inform awarding in the autumn 2020 series will be 'proxy' grade boundaries. These proxy grade boundaries will represent the most likely position of the qualification level grade boundaries in summer 2019 that would have achieved similar outcomes to those observed in summer 2020.

(e) An awarding organisation must calculate the proxy grade boundaries retrospectively for summer 2019 at each of the key grades – A*, A and E for A level, and A and E for AS. The proxy grade boundaries will be the primary source of evidence to inform awarding judgements at the judgemental grade boundaries (A and E – see below in relation to A* at A level).

(f) An awarding organisation must take into account the level of demand of the autumn 2020 question papers (relative to summer 2019) to inform awarding judgements. Any differences in level of demand might suggest that the boundaries in autumn 2020 should be in a different position relative to the proxy grade boundaries from summer 2019. This might include instances where there has been a deliberate attempt to change the level of demand of the question paper.

An awarding organisation must ensure that a confirmatory approach is not used in its awarding. Where the awarding organisation is not content that the level of attainment demonstrated by Learners on the proxy grade boundaries is sufficient to maintain public confidence in the qualification (bearing in mind the unusual context of the autumn series, the desire to align as far as possible with summer 2020, and the guidance provided in this document), further scripts should be reviewed at higher marks.

In reviewing the available script evidence, an awarding organisation must review scripts at individual Component level, where appropriate, and where it does so, must consider the balance of attainment across Components, including how the outcomes on different Components have been balanced in previous series.

An awarding organisation must also consider the impact of the removal of assessments other than Assessments by Examination, for those specifications that usually include such assessment.

Where it would be of value to do so, an awarding organisation must consider additional evidence to provide additional context for its awarding judgements. This includes historical qualification and Component level grade boundaries since the qualification was first awarded, and archive scripts from the summer 2019 awards on the actual grade boundaries. For some qualifications, there will be more evidence available than for others. Awarding organisations must therefore balance the available evidence appropriately for each award.

An awarding organisation must record a rationale for its decisions, regardless of the position of the final recommended boundaries relative to the proxy grade boundaries. This should include evidence to support its qualitative judgements in terms of the scripts that have been reviewed, and a rationale outlining why the performance on the recommended grade boundaries is deemed sufficient within the context of these awards.

An awarding organisation must raise any concerns with Ofqual and other awarding organisations at the twice weekly teleconferences that are scheduled throughout the awarding period.

Qualifications with small entries or limited script evidence

There may be cases where, due to the low entry or the spread of Learners across the mark range, there is little or no script evidence available for an awarding organisation to review around the key grade boundaries (as informed by the position of the proxy grade boundaries). In such instances, an awarding organisation must consider the position of the proxy grade boundaries at the non-key grades, where appropriate.

Where entries are very low, an awarding organisation must, where appropriate, review all of the available script evidence, including scripts that may be closer to one or more of the non-key grade boundaries, alongside other available evidence.

Where entries are larger, but there is no or limited evidence to review around the key grade boundaries, an awarding organisation must, where appropriate, review script evidence that is closer to one or more of the non-key grade boundaries, alongside other available evidence.

In these instances, there is the potential for a wide range of marks at which key boundaries could be set to achieve the same grade outcomes for Learners. When recommending grade boundaries in these circumstances, an awarding organisation must consider the public defensibility of those grade boundaries and the potential implications of their future use and interpretation.

Grade A* at A level

At A level, an awarding organisation must ensure alignment with summer 2020 at grade A*, as far as possible.

Where an awarding organisation recommends a grade A boundary that aligns precisely with the proxy grade A boundary from summer 2019, the grade A* boundary must initially be set as the same mark as the A* proxy grade boundary.

Where an awarding organisation recommends a grade A boundary that does not align with the proxy grade A boundary, the grade A* boundary must initially be set the same number of marks above the recommended grade A boundary that the proxy grade A* boundary is above the proxy grade A boundary.

In all cases, a review of the available script evidence should be conducted. If this review suggests that the A* boundary should be set at a different mark, an awarding organisation must ensure that the report on the award provides evidence to justify the final boundary mark recommended.

Approach to awarding – pre-reform qualifications

The approach to awarding pre-reform AS and A level qualifications must seek alignment, as far as possible, with the level of attainment that would typically have been required to achieve the outcomes observed in summer 2020.

Where possible, an awarding organisation must use the evidence outlined above to support awarding judgements for pre-reform qualifications, noting that, due to the very low entries (in both autumn and summer 2020), a degree of flexibility will be required.

An awarding organisation must record a rationale for its decisions, regardless of the position of the final recommended boundaries. This should include evidence to support its qualitative judgements in terms of the scripts that have been reviewed, and a rationale outlining why the performance on the recommended grade boundaries is deemed sufficient within the context of these awards.

An awarding organisation must raise any concerns with Ofqual and other awarding organisations at the twice weekly teleconferences that are scheduled throughout the awarding period.

Inter-awarding organisation alignment

Given the reliance on judgement rather than statistical methods, the risks to inter-awarding organisation alignment of standards are higher in the autumn

2020 series than would usually be the case. To mitigate these risks, awarding organisations must share the rationale for their awarding decisions with one another following each award. Where there are concerns regarding inter-awarding organisation alignment – raised either by an awarding organisation during the twice weekly teleconferences, or by Ofqual – each awarding organisation must have regard to the evidence provided by other awarding organisations ahead of finalising their own awards.

Review of outcomes

Ofqual will consider the outcomes of each award based on the data provided as part of these procedures, and in the context of the approach outlined above.

Reporting

Reporting requirements

Each awarding organisation must provide the information specified below to Ofqual and according to the timetable specified.

Each awarding organisation must provide Ofqual by Wednesday 28 October 2020 with a schedule of dates (Tuesdays and Thursdays) to show when it expects to submit AS and A level award outcomes.

Data submission should normally be on the first Tuesday or Thursday which is two days after the provisional sign-off of the award (for example, if the provisional sign-off takes place on a Monday the outcomes should be submitted on the following Thursday), but there may be exceptions, for example when the outcomes for a suite of specifications need to be reviewed together before the awards are finalised.

In a few cases an awarding organisation may need to carry out further analyses post-award in order to establish the security of the outcomes. If there is to be a delay in submission, an awarding organisation must notify Ofqual via the data exchange mailbox dataexchange@ofqual.gov.uk as soon as possible and in any event before the date shown on the schedule.

A level reporting – reformed qualifications

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the all Learner outcomes, using **Template Autumn_RA1** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The all Learner outcomes must include partial absentees.

For each qualification where there are Learners that also received a result in summer 2020 (in the same subject group), each awarding organisation must report the percentage of Learners achieving the same grade, a higher grade, or a lower grade, compared to summer 2020, using **Template Autumn_RA1**, and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The grade comparisons with summer 2020 must exclude partial absentees.

For each qualification and optional entry code, each awarding organisation must report the recommended subject level grade boundaries at grades A*, A and E, and the maximum mark for that specification, using **Template_RA2** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

Templates Autumn_RA1 and Autumn_RA2 must be updated each Tuesday and Thursday, according to the schedule provided to Ofqual, to show interim results and recommended grade boundaries to date.

All reformed A level outcomes and recommended grade boundaries must be reported, **using Templates Autumn_RA1 and Autumn_RA2**, by **5pm, Friday 4 December 2020**.

For **GCE A level art and design**, the outcomes from the suite of options must be reported as a whole.

A level reporting – pre-reform qualifications

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the all Learner outcomes, using **Template Autumn_LA1** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The all Learner outcomes must include partial absentees.

For each qualification where there are Learners that also received a result in summer 2020 (in the same subject group), each awarding organisation must report the percentage of Learners achieving the same grade, a higher grade, or a lower grade, compared to summer 2020, using **Template Autumn_LA1**, and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The grade comparisons with summer 2020 must exclude partial absentees.

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the recommended unit level grade boundaries at grades A*, A and E, and the maximum mark for each unit, using **Template_LA2** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

Templates Autumn_LA1 and Autumn_LA2 must be updated each Tuesday and Thursday, according to the schedule provided to Ofqual, to show interim results and recommended grade boundaries to date.

All legacy A level outcomes and recommended grade boundaries must be reported, **using Templates Autumn_LA1 and Autumn_LA2**, by **5pm, Friday 4 December 2020**.

AS reporting – reformed qualifications

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the all Learner outcomes, using **Template Autumn_RAS1** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The all Learner outcomes must include partial absentees.

For each qualification and optional entry code, each awarding organisation must report the recommended subject level grade boundaries at grades A and E, and the maximum mark for that qualification and optional entry code, using **Template_RAS2** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

Templates Autumn_RAS1 and Autumn_RAS2 must be updated each Tuesday and Thursday, according to the schedule provided to Ofqual, to show interim AS results to date.

All AS outcomes and recommended grade boundaries must be reported, **using Templates Autumn_RAS1 and Autumn_RAS2**, by **5pm, Friday 4 December 2020**.

For **AS art and design**, the outcomes from the suite of options must be reported as a whole.

AS reporting – pre-reform qualifications

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the all Learner outcomes, using **Template Autumn_LAS1** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The all Learner outcomes must include partial absentees.

For each qualification where there are Learners that also received a result in summer 2020 (in the same subject group), each awarding organisation must report the percentage of Learners achieving the same grade, a higher grade, or a lower grade, compared to summer 2020, using **Template Autumn_LAS1**, and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual. The grade comparisons with summer 2020 must exclude partial absentees.

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the recommended unit level grade boundaries at grades A and E, and the maximum mark for each unit, using **Template_LAS2** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

Templates Autumn_LAS1 and Autumn_LAS2 must be updated each Tuesday and Thursday, according to the schedule provided to Ofqual, to show interim results and recommended grade boundaries to date.

All legacy A level outcomes and recommended grade boundaries must be reported, **using Templates Autumn_LAS1 and Autumn_LAS2**, by **5pm, Friday 4 December 2020**.

Sending data

Each awarding organisation must confirm its data exchange contacts with Ofqual before the process begins. All data are to be uploaded to the secure collaboration area.

All returns are subject to the final ratification of the awards by the awarding organisation.

On receipt of the information required by this document, Ofqual:

1. Will review the data in the context of the approach for awarding

2. May contact awarding organisations to ask for additional information or clarification, and will aim to do this within 24 hours of receipt

3. Will hold twice weekly teleconferences throughout the awarding period (Tuesdays and Thursdays at noon) with awarding organisation technical colleagues, as necessary, to review data and explore any implications

4. Will discuss outcomes with awarding organisations at the Maintenance of Standards meetings on

    - **7 December 2020 (AS and A level)**

Principles for using the secure collaboration area

1. The collaboration area is to be used for sensitive data relating to the data exchange that was previously sent to Ofqual by email as an encrypted attachment.

2. Email should be used as usual where no sensitive data is included or attached. All email correspondence should be sent to dataexchange@ofqual.gov.uk.

3. Where appropriate, notification alerts should be set up by individual users to notify them when folders or documents are added or changed.

4. In terms of version control, all templates must be uploaded using the date as a prefix, for example 021120-WJEC-Template Autumn_LAS1. Therefore, whenever a revised data template is uploaded, please create this as a new document using the date as a prefix and the time as a suffix where necessary.

5. Old versions of templates must not be deleted from the collaboration area.

6. Awarding organisation users must not create extra folders within the data exchange library of the collaboration area without consulting Ofqual first.