



Guidance
GCSEs, AS and A levels: a guide for students in England (HTML)
 Updated 16 December 2020

Who's who in the exam system

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Ofqual

[Ofqual](#) is the qualifications regulator in England. We decide which organisations can offer GCSEs, AS and A levels and set rules that exam boards must follow.

The Department for Education

The [Department for Education](#) sets:

- the subject content that GCSEs, AS and A levels must cover
- policy for what maintained schools are expected to teach
- measures to judge schools' performance

The exam boards

Exam boards develop, mark and award GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications. There are currently four exam boards: [AQA](#), [OCR](#), [Pearson](#) and [WJEC Eduqas](#).

JCQ

[JCQ](#) is the exam boards' membership organisation. Exam boards use JCQ to set common policies and procedures that schools and colleges must follow when delivering GCSEs, AS and A levels.

Schools and colleges

Schools and colleges are responsible for teaching and learning, and preparing you to take the qualifications. They make sure all the right arrangements are in place, give you your results and provide support, if needed, once you have received your results.

Who should I speak to: before & during exams

Before exams

Your school or college will decide:

- the range of subjects you can choose from and which qualifications they will enter you for whether they will enter you for [foundation or higher tier](#) for GCSEs that are tiered (maths, science, statistics and Modern Foreign Languages)
- whether, because you have a disability including a learning disability, they should apply for reasonable adjustments on your behalf
- if, because you are injured or taken ill shortly before the exam, you should be given some extra support in the way you take your assessment, such as a scribe who will write your answer down for you
- whether you might qualify for a small number of extra marks, for example because of illness or injury affecting you or someone very close to you

[Reasonable adjustments](#) are changes made to an assessment or to the way an assessment is carried out that reduce or remove a disadvantage caused by a student's disability. Some of the most common adjustments are:

- changes to assessment materials, for example, large print or braille exam papers
- assistance with specific tasks, for example, another person might read questions to you or write your dictated answers
- extra time to complete assessments

Your school or college can also request that the exam board [take account of something that could affect how you'd be expected to perform in an assessment](#). The exam board will decide whether an adjustment should be made to the way your exams are taken or if you should be given a small number of extra marks.

During exams

Your school or college will make sure that:

- exam papers are stored securely
- any reasonable adjustments or other changes allowed to the way you take your exams are in place
- exams are administered properly

If you think that an [exam has not been conducted properly or you think that some students have had an unfair advantage](#), you should raise this with your exams officer, a teacher or a family member. If you would rather not talk to your school or college, you can contact the relevant exam board or Ofqual.

Exams boards are responsible for the qualifications that you take, including developing and delivering the exam papers.

If you are concerned that there was an error in an exam paper or that you didn't have fair access to it, you should contact your school or college.

Exam boards must test all the content set out in their specifications over a number of years and must not ask questions on anything not included in the specifications. If you have concerns you should speak to your teacher.

Who should I speak to: marking & moderation

Exam boards [mark students' exam scripts](#). Around 63,000 examiners, mostly experienced teachers, do most of their marking on-screen. This means different answers on your exam paper may be given to different examiners to mark, unlike paper-based marking. Examiners' work is quality checked by the exam boards to ensure their marking is consistent and to the required standard.

In a normal exam series, your teacher will mark some of your work (non-exam assessment) for subjects such as GCSE art & design and drama, or AS and A level design & technology. In Autumn 2020 most subjects will be judged on exam performance alone. For GCSE, AS and A level art & design qualifications, your artwork and designs will be marked by the exam board. [Normal arrangements for reviews of moderation](#) do not apply for the autumn 2020 exams.

Who should I speak to: results and post-results

Autumn 2020 was an exceptional exam series put in place for students who were unable to receive a grade in 2020 or who wanted the opportunity to try and improve upon their summer 2020 grade. It was only open to those students who were entered for exams in summer 2020. The [generosity of grading standard in summer 2020 will be carried forward and applied](#) when awarding grades for the autumn 2020 exams.

Your school or college:

- receives your results and will pass these onto you. If you believe that there has been an error in the marking of your work, you should discuss this with your school or college
- can apply for a review of marking on your behalf

The exam board will carry out a review of marking if a request is made by your school or college by the deadline – the table below shows the autumn/winter 2020 deadlines.

| Qualification result day | Deadline for review request |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 16 December 2020 | 4 February 2021 |
| 13 January 2021 | 18 February 2021 |
| 10 February 2021 | 18 March 2021 |

If you are a private candidate (someone who does not study for their qualification at a school or college but takes the exam or assessment at an exam board approved school or college) you can contact the exam board directly to ask for a review.

On review, if no marking errors are found then your marks will not change. If a marking error is found then your mark may go up or down. If your mark does change, the review could mean that your grade stays the same or goes up or down. An exam board cannot provide extra marks because you are close to a grade boundary or because you did not get the grade your school or college predicted.

If you and your school or college still have concerns after the review of marking, exam boards must offer an appeals process. This gives your school or college the opportunity to challenge the review decisions. They can also challenge exam boards' decisions about reasonable adjustments, extra support or malpractice.

Who should I speak to: complaints

If you have a question about any of the qualifications you are taking then speaking to your teacher or exams officer is usually the best place to start.

Ofqual

Ofqual's role during and after exams is to [maintain standards of the qualifications](#) over time and across exam boards.

You might [come to Ofqual if you want to complain that an exam board hasn't followed our rules or its own published policies and procedures](#) for its qualifications. We would usually expect you to have complained to the exam board before coming to us, to give the exam board an opportunity to resolve your complaint.

Making a complaint to Ofqual is not the route to follow if you want to request a review of marking. If you think there has been a marking error, you must use the exam board's review process instead.

If you and your school or college are unhappy with the result of an appeal following a review of marking, the school or college can ask Ofqual to review the case. This is called the [exam procedure review service](#) (EPRS). We look at whether the exam board has followed our rules and its own procedures, and, if not, whether your result is inappropriate.

Further information and links

There is lots more information on our website that you might find helpful:

- [Ofqual guide for schools and colleges](#): regulating GCSEs, AS and A levels.
- [Ask Ofqual - common questions answered](#): videos giving guidance on common questions we receive
- [Ofqual postcards](#): summary information about GCSE, AS and A level reforms
- [Ofqual blog](#): we publish regular blog posts, [sign up to receive updates](#)
- [Contact Ofqual](#): if you need further information or want to make a complaint

You can access the online version of this guide at www.gov.uk/ofqual

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[Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): guidance and support](#) [Check the new rules for January 2021](#)

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