

STATUTORY GUIDANCE

**Autumn/November 2020 and January 2021
Data Exchange Procedures**

GCSE and Project Qualifications

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Autumn/November 2020 and January 2021 Data Exchange Procedures – GCSE and Project Qualifications

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 data exchange for GCSE and extended project qualifications in relation to the assessment series held during autumn and winter 2020 and January 2021 (the "winter series"). The procedures for AS and A level have been published separately.¹

The requirements in this document apply to post-reform GCSE Qualifications and to extended project qualifications at Level 3.

This is a **Regulatory Document** under **Condition B7** of the General Conditions of Recognition² (October 2020): Compliance with Regulatory Documents.

In addition –

- a. in relation to GCSE Qualifications, this document sets requirements under Condition GSCE3.1 and GCSE9.1 of the GCSE Qualification Level Conditions³; and
- b. in relation to extended project qualifications, this document sets requirements under Condition Project3.1⁴.

The requirements in this document do not apply to the Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN).

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/data-exchange-procedures-for-a-level-gcse-level-1-and-2-certificates>

² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/ofqual-handbook>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/gcse-9-to-1-qualification-level-conditions>

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/project-qualification-level-conditions-and-requirements>

Awarding requirements – GCSE

1. GCSE qualifications are potentially available in all subjects in the winter series. Although English language and maths are available every November, the entry requirements this November are different to a typical year since Learners who were unable to receive a result in summer 2020 are able to enter, regardless of their age.
2. The entries for the winter series are unlikely to be representative of the cohorts typically entering in a summer or November series. Further, the entries for many qualifications will be low. Given this, 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.
3. The requirements outlined below apply to the awarding of all GCSE qualifications in the winter series.

Approach to awarding

4. An awarding organisation must ensure that persons involved in the setting of specified levels of attainment for its GCSE Qualifications in the winter series ("awarders") are adequately briefed in line with the requirements set out below and the 'Briefing document for awarders' prepared by Ofqual.
5. An awarding organisation must adhere to the following requirements in its approach to awarding in the winter series for each GCSE Qualification which it makes available –
 - (a) Awarding for the winter 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 winter 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 as a basis for awarding in the winter series. Rather, an awarding organisation must set standards in the context of the current exceptional circumstances. 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 winter 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 winter 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 – 9, 7, 4, and 1. The proxy grade boundaries will be the primary source of evidence to inform awarding judgements at the judgemental grade boundaries (7, 4 and 1 – see below in relation to grade 9).
 - (f) An awarding organisation must take into account the level of demand of the winter series question papers (relative to summer 2019) to inform awarding judgements. Any differences in level of demand might suggest that the boundaries in the winter series 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.
6. 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 winter 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.
 7. 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.
 8. 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.
 9. 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.

10. For tiered qualifications, an awarding organisation must consider the outcomes of test equating (chained equi-percentile or nominal weights method) to support comparability between tiers at grades 4 and 5, where there are sufficient entries on each tier and it is appropriate to do so. In general, the chained equi-percentile method should be used where there are more than 250 Learners at each tier. Where there are 250 or fewer Learners at one or both tiers, the nominal weights method could be used. For specifications with very small entries, it may not be possible to use test equating.
11. 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.
12. 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

13. 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.
14. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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 9

17. An awarding organisation must ensure alignment with summer 2020 at grade 9, as far as possible.
18. Where an awarding organisation recommends a grade 7 boundary that aligns precisely with the proxy grade 7 boundary from summer 2019, the grade 9 boundary must initially be set as the same mark as the 9 proxy grade boundary.
19. Where an awarding organisation recommends a grade 7 boundary that does not align with the proxy grade 7 boundary, the grade 9 boundary must initially be set the same number of marks above the recommended grade 7 boundary that the proxy grade 9 boundary is above the proxy grade 7 boundary.
20. In all cases, a review of the available script evidence should be conducted. If this review suggests that the 9 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.

Higher tier grade 3

21. When awarding a tiered GCSE Qualification, an awarding organisation should provisionally set the higher tier grade 3/U or 4-3/U boundary arithmetically, in accordance with the qualification level conditions. This should be the recommended grade boundary unless there is compelling evidence to set the boundary at a different mark.
22. There are several indicators that might suggest that the arithmetic position of the higher tier grade 3/U or 4-3/U boundary should be reviewed. Examples of such indicators (though there might be others) include instances where:
 - a. There is a higher than anticipated proportion of Learners that would otherwise be ungraded on the higher tier; or
 - b. The position of the higher tier grade 3/U or 4-3/U boundary raises concerns.
23. Where there are indicators that it might be appropriate to review the position of the higher tier grade 3/U or 4-3/U boundary, an awarding organisation must investigate this further and consider the possible reasons. In doing so, consideration must be given to whether there is an issue at another grade that is impacting on the grade 3/U or 4-3/U boundary or outcomes.

Foundation tier grade 5

24. When awarding a tiered GCSE Qualification, an awarding organisation should provisionally set the foundation tier grade 5/4 or 5-5/5-4 boundary arithmetically, in accordance with the qualification level conditions. This should be the recommended grade boundary unless there is compelling evidence to set the boundary at a different mark.
25. Where there are indicators that it might be appropriate to review the position of the foundation tier grade 5/4 or 5-5/5-4 boundary, an awarding organisation must investigate this further and consider the possible reasons. In doing so, consideration must be given to whether there is an issue at another grade that is impacting on the grade 5/4 or 5-5/5-4 boundary or outcomes.

Inter-awarding organisation alignment

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

27. 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.

Awarding requirements – extended project qualification⁵

28. These requirements apply to the awarding of the extended project qualification in the winter series.

Approach to awarding

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

30. An awarding organisation must adhere to the following requirements in its approach to awarding in winter for each extended project qualification which it makes available –

- (a) Awarding for the winter 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) 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 qualification in previous years (as demonstrated by the archive scripts on the grade boundaries from previous years) is not to be used as a basis for awarding in the winter series. Rather, an awarding organisation must set standards specific to this winter 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 winter 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 winter 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

⁵ An extended project qualification is a level 3 project qualification.

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* and E. The proxy grade boundaries will be the primary source of evidence to inform awarding judgements at the judgemental grade boundaries.

31. 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 winter 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.
32. Where it would be of value to do so, an awarding organisation must consider additional evidence to provide additional context for its awarding judgements and balance the available evidence appropriately. This includes historical qualification grade boundaries since the qualification was first awarded, and archive scripts from the summer 2019 awards on the actual grade boundaries.
33. 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.
34. 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

35. 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.
36. 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.
37. 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.

38. 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.

Inter-awarding organisation alignment

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

40. 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 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 Friday 4 December 2020 with a schedule of dates (Tuesdays and Thursdays) to show when it expects to submit GCSE and extended project 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.

GCSE reporting

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the all Learner outcomes, using **Template Autumn_G1** 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_G1**, 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 9, 7, 4 and 1, and the maximum mark for that specification, using **Template_G2** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

Templates Autumn_G1 and Autumn_G2 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 GCSE outcomes and recommended grade boundaries must be reported, **using Templates Autumn_G1 and Autumn_G2**, by **12 noon, Thursday 28 January 2021**.

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

Extended project qualification reporting

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the all Learner outcomes, using **Template Autumn_E1** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

For each qualification where there are Learners that also received a result in summer 2020, 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_E1**, and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

For each qualification, each awarding organisation must report the recommended qualification level grade boundaries at grades A* and E, and the maximum mark for that qualification, using **Template_E2** and according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

Templates Autumn_E1 and Autumn_E2 must be updated according to the schedule provided to Ofqual.

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
 - **5 January 2021 (GCSE English language and maths)**
 - **29 January 2021 (GCSE excluding English language and maths)**

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_G1. 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.



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