

GUIDANCE

Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades: summer 2021

Summer 2021 grades for GCSE, AS and A level,
Project Qualifications and Advanced Extension
Award in maths

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Introduction

This information is relevant to all exam centres in England using the following qualifications regulated by Ofqual and offered by AQA, OCR, Pearson, WJEC Eduqas, ASDAN and City & Guilds:

- GCSEs (including short course GCSEs)
- AS and A levels
- Project Qualifications (L1, L2 and EPQ)
- Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) in maths

This information also applies to exam centres in Wales and Northern Ireland who deliver relevant Ofqual-regulated qualifications offered by AQA, OCR, Pearson, WJEC Eduqas, ASDAN and City & Guilds.

Since March 2020, students' education has been disrupted by the closure of schools and colleges to all but vulnerable children and children of key workers, ongoing potential for self-isolation and further closures. On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced, in the context of new national restrictions, that [exams in summer 2021 could not go ahead as planned](#). On 13 January, the Secretary of State asked Ofqual to [jointly consult on alternative arrangements to award grades](#). [The consultation](#) ran between 15 and 29 January and received over 100,000 responses. We have published [the analysis of the responses, and our decisions](#), which were made in the light of a direction from the Secretary of State.

In summer 2021, exam boards will ask exam centres to generate, for each subject, teacher assessed grades for their students. These grades should be based on a range of evidence completed as part of the course, including evidence produced in the coming months, which demonstrates the student's performance on the subject content they have been taught.

This document provides information for heads of centre, heads of department, subject leads and teachers about how to generate these grades and the evidence that should be considered. Exam boards will provide a package of support materials to help teachers make these judgements and will provide further advice on how centres should collect and submit evidence. Questions should generally be directed to exam boards in the first instance.

The grades submitted to exam boards must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the student's performance across a range of evidence, on the curriculum content that they have been taught. Heads of centre should emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair – see [separate information about making objective judgements](#).

Exam boards will provide details of the quality assurance requirements. Each centre is required to put in place an internal quality assurance process, including internal standardisation of marking and grading judgements, which will be checked by exam boards. Exam boards will also check a sample of the evidence used to support teacher grades. Heads of centre are required to confirm, when submitting their grades, that the exam board requirements have been met.

The Department for Education has confirmed that qualification grades awarded, using alternative assessment arrangements in spring and summer 2021, will not be used to create performance table measures or qualification achievement rates (QARs) at school or college level for use in accountability. More details on what this means for accountability arrangements in 2020/21 will follow.

Standards in 2021

For every subject, exam boards require each school, college or other exam centre to submit a grade for each student, based on an assessment of the standard at which they are performing.

Exam boards will provide further advice and guidance to exemplify the standard of work, including additional grade descriptors to supplement those previously published by Ofqual,¹ as well as exemplar materials.

Centres should consider the standard at which each student has performed over the course of study. This judgement should be based on the evidence of a student's performance on the subject content which they have been taught, whether in the classroom or via remote learning. The evidence could include work which has already been completed during the course as well as that which will be completed in the weeks and months to come. It is important that the judgements are objective and based on the evidence produced by a student on the content they have been taught.

In coming to this judgement, centres should seek to make it no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years, while bearing in mind that students in 2021 might not have been taught all the content and so might not demonstrate such a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding.

As part of their overall quality assurance, centres should consider the grades for this year's cohort compared to cohorts from previous years when exams have taken place. For centres with relatively large and stable cohorts, this historical data can provide a useful guide to the expected profile of results and enables centres to check that they have not been overly harsh or lenient in their assessment of the 2021

¹ See for example [Grade descriptors for GCSEs graded 9 to 1](#)

cohort compared to previous years. Where centres have taken on private candidates, they should generally be excluded from such comparisons.

Sources of evidence

Centres should continue teaching students for as long as possible, to cover as much of the specification content as possible and they should aim to assess students on as broad a range of specification content as they can. Evidence should relate to the specification content and should reflect, as far as possible, the sorts of questions and tasks that students would normally undertake in preparation for the qualification. Questions and tasks should be appropriately accessible for lower ability students and appropriately demanding to allow higher ability students to demonstrate performance to support higher grades.

Centres will be asked to make a holistic judgement of each student's performance on a range of evidence relating to the qualification's specification content that they have been taught (either in the classroom or via remote learning). Teachers can use evidence of a student's performance from any point during the course of study, provided they are confident that it reflects the student's own work.

In coming to these holistic judgments, teachers will use their professional judgement to balance the full range of evidence available for each student.

Centres should aim to provide high quality evidence that clearly relates to the specification, in terms of both content and assessment. Exam boards will sample some of this evidence as part of their quality assurance, and if not satisfied, could ask a centre to reconsider its grades for a subject.

We recommend the following range of evidence, where available:

Types of assessment evidence

1. Student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by the exam board, including groups of questions, past papers or similar materials such as practice or sample papers.
2. Non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework), even if this has not been fully completed.
3. Student work produced in centre-devised tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as exam board materials and have been marked in a way that reflects exam board mark schemes. This can include substantial class or homework (including those that took place during remote learning), internal tests taken by pupils and mock exams taken over the course of study.
4. Records of a student's capability and performance over the course of study in performance-based subjects such as music, drama and PE.

5. Records of each student's progress and performance over the course of study.

Centres should bear in mind the following factors in deciding how to balance different sources of evidence.

When the evidence was produced

More recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance, although there may be exceptions.

What students were asked to do

Centres should aim to use consistent sources of evidence for a class or cohort that relate closely to the specification requirements. Some tiered GCSEs specify content for higher tier students only, and in all qualifications, centres will need to provide accessible questions/tasks for lower attaining students and appropriately demanding questions/tasks for higher attaining students to support higher grades.

How the evidence was produced

Centres should be confident that work produced is the student's own and that the student has not been given inappropriate levels of support to complete it, either in the centre, at home or with an external tutor. Exam boards will investigate instances where it appears that evidence is not authentic.

The range and amount of evidence could vary between students and across subjects. Centres will need to be flexible where some students have missed particular assessments, through no fault of their own.

Exam boards will not prescribe the evidence that centres must use. Teachers can draw on existing records and available evidence from any point in the course. Centres should make sure that students are aware of the evidence that will form the basis of their final grade.

Centres should bear in mind the following when making judgements.

1. Expected tier of entry in tiered GCSE subjects – teacher assessed grades must reflect the tier of entry (9 to 3 for higher tier; 5 to 1 for foundation, as well as U).
2. Authentic evidence from other centres or established educational providers where a student might have studied during the course or such evidence from where a student has studied with the support of a specialist teacher or tutor. Exam boards will provide further guidance to support centres in how they can determine whether evidence is likely to be authentic, including where they may normally rely on evidence that has been produced with certain types of provider without the need for detailed checks.

Students should, wherever possible, continue with their NEA as it covers key areas of the specification. Performance on NEA, even if not complete, should be balanced with other evidence of the student's performance. Centres should bear in mind that many students normally achieve a higher grade on their NEA than in their exams, which should be considered when coming to the overall judgement.

Reasonable adjustments for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place when evidence was generated. Where they were not, centres should take that into account when coming to their judgement. Where appropriate, this should include input from appropriate specialist teachers and other professionals.

Special consideration requests, in the event that a student is unable to take an assessment or suffers a traumatic event that might affect their performance, will not apply this summer because students will not be taking their exams. However, where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, centres should bear that in mind when making their judgements.

For GCSE English and GCSE modern foreign languages² spoken language, and A level biology, chemistry, physics and geology practical work, exam boards will also collect grades for the separate endorsements. There will be no requirement to collect evidence for these assessments.

There will be **no requirement** to submit statements of curriculum requirements being met in subjects such as GCSE geography field work.

Private candidates

Private candidates should be assessed in a similar way to other students, using a range of evidence. This could include taking the exam board provided assessment materials in a suitable form or be focused on other sources of evidence. Private candidates should have the same opportunity as other students to be assessed on what they have learnt, but centres will need to bear in mind the particular circumstances of their students in the approach they take to determining grades, including the fact that the centre often will not already have previous evidence on which to base a judgement. Where a centre accepts private candidates, exam boards will expect centres to provide to private candidates a description of the main elements of their approach to assessment before they register with them.

This is likely to mean that centres decide to use the full range of available flexibility in how grades are determined for these students to, for example:

² This is an [exceptional arrangement for 2021 only](#).

- draw on evidence from other educational institutions in line with the point above
- conduct assessments remotely if necessary
- set new centre-devised assessments that reflect what the student has been taught and the specification
- rely more heavily on the board-provided assessment materials
- exceptionally, conduct recorded oral assessments with the students where insufficient other evidence is available

Boards will also provide guidance on potential combinations of evidence that could be used for a specific subject. In all cases, the head of centre will make sure they have collected sufficient evidence to ensure that they are able to confirm that the grades are a true representation of student performance. Exam boards will produce further guidance that assists those centres that may wish to determine grades for private candidates in doing so.

Submitting data

Exam boards will contact centres in due course with further instructions about how to submit the data. Centres will not need to send any supporting evidence, such as student work, to the exam boards, but centres should retain the work and the records of the marking and grading judgements. This may be subject to scrutiny during exam board quality assurance checks, and it will be required in cases where a student wishes to appeal their result.

Internal sign-off within the centre

Department sign-off

Each grade for a subject must be signed off by at least 2 teachers in that subject, one of whom should be the head of department or subject lead. Where there is only one teacher in the subject or department, or only one is available, the head of centre should be the second signatory. Where a staff member might have a personal interest in a candidate (for example as a relative), heads of centre should make sure that additional controls are put in place, as appropriate.

Head of centre sign-off

The head of centre is required to confirm that the grades are a true representation of student performance. If the head of centre is unavailable to do this, it may be

delegated to a deputy. The head of centre will be required to submit the following declaration when the data is submitted.

I confirm that:

- ☐ these grades have been checked for accuracy, reviewed by a second member of staff and are accurate and represent the professional judgements made by my staff
- ☐ entries were appropriate for each candidate in that students entered were those already studying the course, and each candidate has no more than one entry per subject
- ☐ my centre has met the requirements set out by exam boards/JCQ for internal quality assurance
- ☐ I am satisfied that each student's grade is based on an appropriately broad range of evidence, and is their own work
- ☐ exam board requirements have been met for any private candidates
- ☐ access arrangements and reasonable adjustments were provided with appropriate input from the SENCo and other specialists (and where they were not, that has been taken into account)
- ☐ I and my staff have taken note of the guidance from exam boards about minimising bias, and I am confident that the judgements are fair
- ☐ all relevant student evidence and records are available for inspection, as necessary



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