Part of
Education, universities and childcare during coronavirus

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Guidance

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

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Introduction

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

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

Ofqual's guidance applies to exam centres in Wales and Northern Ireland who deliver relevant Ofqual-regulated qualifications offered by AQA, CCEA, Pearson, WJEC Eduqas, WJEC and City & Guilds. For all other qualifications, centres should contact the relevant awarding organisation for further advice.

Since March 2020, students' education has been disrupted by the closure of schools and colleges to most students and other disruptions to the delivery of exams, creating a ongoing potential for self-isolation and further disruption. On 4 January 2021, the Prime Minister announced that all students would be learning from home and that summer 2021 could not go ahead as planned. On 13 January, the Secretary of State for Education Ofqual fit lands consult on alternative arrangements for award grades. The consultation closed on 20 January 2021. Ofqual published its response to the consultation and published the outcome of the measures, and our response, which were made in the right of a direction from the Secretary of State.

For summer 2021 exam boards will use exam centres's evidence, for each subject, teacher assessed grades for their students. These grades should be based on a range of evidence relevant to part of the course, including evidence produced in the last few 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 teachers and other staff involved in the process of submitting teacher assessed grades. It has been created for boards will provide a package of support materials to help teachers make these judgements and will also provide further advice on how centres should gather and use evidence. Ofqual's guidance on the administration of the collection and submission of evidence should be directed to exam boards.

The grades submitted to exam boards must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgment of the student's performance across a range of evidence, on the curriculum content that they have been taught. For private candidates who have not been taught a course of study leading to the relevant subject, heads of centre should emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair – see separate information about making objective judgements.

Centres (or teacher assessors) have to make certain decisions about how students, parents or carers to submit grades that are higher than the evidence supports. Heads of centre should keep records of such decisions and might be required to report to the exam boards any cases where they believe inappropriate pressure is being put on teachers. Exam boards may treat such cases as potential malpractice.

Exam boards will provide details of the quality assurance requirements. Each centre is responsible for the quality of its own assessments and will need to have in place robust exam boards. Centre internal quality assurance will include internal standardisation of marking and grading judgements. Exam boards will request evidence from all centres to ensure that standards are maintained across the country. Exam boards will make sure all 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 alternative grade measures or qualification achievement rates at school or college level for use in accountability. Plans details on what this means for accountability arrangements in 2021 to 2021 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 a range of evidence which demonstrates the standard at which they are performing.

Exam boards will provide further advice and guidance to exemplify the standard of work required for each grade, based on the evidence that teachers have gathered or those previously published by Ofqual. [footnote 1] as well as exemplar materials. Centres should consider these when making their judgements.

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 in relation to the content they have been taught, whether in the classroom or remote learning. The evidence could include work which has recently been completed during the course as well as that which will be completed in the weeks and months to come. It is important that judgements are objective and are based on the evidence produced by a student on the content they have been taught.

In coming to this judgement, centres should not need to make it no easier for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years. This is because the standard of the assessment evidence should be fair, so that the level of performance required for a grade has not changed. However, for GCSE subjects in all subjects combined. At qualification level, this historical data can provide a useful guide to the standard. Centres should use this information as a check that they have not been more lenient or harsher in their assessment of the standard in 2021 cohort compared to previous years in which exams took place. Where centres have taken on private candidates, they should be excluded from comparisons.

Where the overall results of GCSE or A level cohort were different from recent years (2017-2019 or 2019) centres should record the reasons for this, as exam boards might want to see this if the centre is selected for external quality assurance. Exam boards will also use this information to check that the standard has not changed, including where a centre's results are considerably lower or higher than recent years.

Sources of evidence

Centres should continue teaching students for as long as possible, to cover as much of the curriculum content as they can. In some cases, individual students might have missed substantially more teaching than their peers, and are therefore unable to produce sufficient evidence to support a grade.

Heads of centre will be required to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to provide the basis for a grade. Evidence should relate to the specification content and should reflect, as far as possible, the sorts of questions and tasks that students have been accustomed to completing in class. Teacher assessed grades and tasks should be appropriately accessible for lower ability students to attempt and demonstrating to allow higher ability students to demonstrate performance to support grades at the top of the range. Tasks should also be accessible for students with special educational needs or disabilities (SENDS).

Centres should make students aware of the sources of evidence that will form the basis of the grade submitted, although students should not be told the detail of the grade submitted to the exam board. As far as possible, the sources of evidence should be consistent for all students in a class, although there may be some differences in sources for their selection. The centre will make the final judgement about what is to be included and will need to document the rationale for any instances where consistent evidence is not used for a whole class or cohort.

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 from a student's work from earlier in the course of study, as long as it is relevant to the content of the subject/s the student's been taught.

In coming to these holistic judgements, teachers will use their professional judgement to balance the full range of evidence available for each student against the performance standard set out in the grade descriptors and exemplification material, in line with the guidance. Centres should be mindful that students may not have had the opportunity to produce high quality evidence that clearly relates to the specification content, both content and assessment. Exam boards will sample some of this evidence as part of their quality assurance, and if they are not satisfied, they could ask a centre to reconsider its grades for a subject.

Where a student's coursework/practical/portfolio evidence was published is no longer available, appropriate records should be included instead. For example, if a student's work was lost, centres should use students' feedback, a copy of the marks given, plan and the grade boundaries used should be included alongside a record of the mark a student achieved. Any work produced by students after this guidance was published on 19 March 2021 should be available in the school or college if it is to be used as part of the evidence to support the grade.

Types of assessment evidence

We recommend the following types of evidence, where available:

1. Student work produced in response to assessment materials normally provided by the exam board (including past papers, and the groups of questions being provided to students for completing this summer, or similar materials normally provided in 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 could be in the form of a mock exam, or other assessments, which may or may not reflect exam exam schemes. This can include substantial tasks or tasks (including those that took place during remote learning), internal tests (taken in the classroom or remotely learning), or other tests.
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 a student's standard of work 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, particularly if a student has made significant progress where a student has experienced significant ill health since the earlier assessments.

What students were asked to do

Centres should aim to use consistent sources of evidence for a class or cohort that reflect the work students have been asked to do. Any significant variations in evidence should be documented. Some tiered GCSE's specify content for higher tier students only, and in all qualifications, centres will need to provide accessible questions/tasks for lower ability students and appropriately challenging questions/tasks for higher attaining students, to support them coming to the overall judgement.

How the evidence was produced

Centres should be confident that work produced is the student's own and that the evidence is fair, and that any assistance provided to support a student, or by the centre, at home as well as in school/college. Exam boards will investigate instances when it appears that evidence is not authentic.

Other considerations

Centres will need to be confident could vary between subjects. Centres will need to be flexible where students have missed particular assessments, through no fault of their own, and may substitute other evidence if available.

Where a student's judgement of 2 different centres, as has moved from one centre through the course of study, relevant evidence from both centres could be considered. It is the responsibility of the centre making the second entry to obtain as much evidence as evidence from other centres, including details of what was taught.

Where a student has worked with a specialist teacher or education professional [footnote 2], the centre should seek information from them as appropriate when considering the student's performance against the standard. Where a student has been taught by more the same specialist as other students in a class, specialist teachers of deaf or hard of impaired learners, or teachers of EAL learners or virtual school teachers working with looked after children, the centre may find it helpful to seek information and advice, also refer to the detailed guidance from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). While discussions with teachers and other professionals should take place before the teacher assessed grade is decided by the centre, those final judgements should be made confidential within the centre.

Exam boards will provide the evidence that centres must use. Teachers can draw on existing records and available evidence from any point in the course. Centres should be clear that students are aware of the evidence that will form the basis of their grade.

Centres should bear in mind the following when making judgements.

- Expectations of entry is linked to GCSE subjects – teachers assessed grades for students who are entered for GCSE, AS or A level should be based on AS or L3.
- Authentic evidence from other centres or established educational partners where a student might have studied during the course or such evidence from where a student has been taught by a specialist teacher. Ofqual's GCSE grade descriptors 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 by other types of provider without the need to be confident about this.

Students should, wherever possible, continue with their NEA as it covers key areas of the specification. Furthermore on NEA, which is not complete, should be marked with other evidence of the student's performance. Centres should bear in mind that many students will have made good progress on their NEA, and that it should be considered when coming to the overall judgement.

Reasonable adjustments for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place where evidence was generated. Where they were not, centres should take that into account when coming to their judgement. Where appropriate, this should include, for example, the use of a scribe or reader, or other adjustments which would need to ensure that meet their obligations under the Equality 2010. Centres should note that they are not permitted to change students for putting in place reasonable adjustments. [footnote 3]

Since students are not taking exams this year, the usual special consideration processes will not be available. Centres should take into account any circumstances might have impacted a student's performance. For example in exact exams, centres should take that into account when making their judgements. The JCQ guide to special consideration sets out the sorts of personal circumstances that should be taken into account.

For GCSE English and GCSE modern foreign languages [footnote 4], spoken language, and A level biology, chemistry, physics and geology practical work, exam boards will also provide a package of support materials. Centres will need to use the relevant evidence for these assessments and these grades will not be subject to exam board quality assurance or be part of the appeals process. Centres should submit these grades alongside the qualification grades, by Friday 28 May 2021.

There will be no requirement to submit statements of centre assessed grades 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 controlled environment, or using other evidence of their work. Private candidates will be the same opportunity to offer their best performance. For example in exact exams, centres should take that into account when making their judgements. The JCQ guide to special consideration sets out the sorts of personal circumstances that should be taken into account.

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Submitting data and evidence

This section has been updated following confirmation of the detailed arrangements for external quality assurance.

Exam boards will contact centres in due course with further instructions about how to submit the data. Centres will be able to submit grades from 26 May, in the final deadline for submission of data, including grades for the endorsements, is Friday 18 June 2021. Exam boards will use the information provided by centres to carry out their work, when their grades to be finalised, but centres should retain the work and the records of the marking and grading judgements. This may be subject to scrutiny by exam boards, Ofqual or other regulators, and will be required in some cases where a student wishes to appeal their result.

Once the grades are received, every centre will be asked to provide samples of student work. There are several reasons for this. The deadline for centres to submit data is relatively late in the summer term, to maximise the time available for teaching. Exam boards need to have time to carry out quality assurance checks on the data, which might have implications for effective performance. For example in exact exams, centres should take that into account when making their judgements. The JCQ guide to special consideration sets out the sorts of personal circumstances that should be taken into account.

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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 person to sign off the grade. Where there are multiple teachers of candidates (for example as a relative), heads of centre should make sure that additional centres 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 a declaration when the data is submitted, which will include the following statements:

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
- the professional judgements have been made based on evidence of students' work already studied by the course, and such evidence has no more than one term per subject
- my centre has met the requirements set out by exam boards/JCQ for internal quality assurance
- I understand that each student's grades is based on an appropriately broad range of evidence, including evidence from other centres, providers or specialist teachers of relevant, and to their own work
- each student has been taught (or, in the case of private candidates, has studied) an appropriate amount of content to provide the basis for a grade
- I understand that my centre may be subject to quality assurance checks
- access arrangements and reasonable adjustments have been put in place 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 Ofqual guidance on making objective judgements, and have taken steps to ensure that students, their parents or carers, and I are confident that judgements are fair
- all relevant student evidence and records are available for inspection, as necessary

1. See for example Grade descriptors for GCSE(9-1), AS and A level.
2. This would not include a private tutor in cases where the subject has been taught at the centre.
3. Changing for providing or arranging reasonable adjustments is unlawful under Section 20 (7) of the Equality Act 2010. This means that where an adjustment or aid is provided to a student to enable them to take part in a test or exam in a particular way the aid, the centre must not change the disabled person any additional for in relation to that adjustment or aid.
4. This is an exceptional arrangement for 2021 only.