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Guidance

Ofqual guide for schools and colleges 2026

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Applies to England

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About this guide

This guide explains what schools, colleges and other exam or assessment centres can expect from awarding organisations regulated by Ofqual and the arrangements for qualifications in 2026.

In this guide we use the term schools and colleges to refer to schools, colleges and other exam or assessment centres. Where this guide refers to “you” it is referring to a school or college that offers qualifications regulated by Ofqual. We expect the main users of this guide to be those supporting students through their qualifications.

This guide covers qualifications typically taken in an academic year, in schools or colleges, and reported in the [Department for Education’s performance tables](#), including GCSEs, AS and A levels, Technical Qualifications within a T Level and vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs). Some of the information is qualification specific and we make it clear where information only applies to a certain type of qualification.

This guide does not cover on demand assessments such as Functional Skills qualifications, English for Speakers of Other Languages, apprenticeship end-point assessments and other VTQs not included in the Department for Education’s performance tables.

This guide should be read in conjunction with any awarding organisation or [Joint Council for Qualifications \(JCQ\)](#) guidance relevant to your qualifications. For qualification specific queries, you should speak to the relevant awarding organisation.

Roles and responsibilities

Ofqual

Ofqual regulates awarding organisations that design, deliver and award qualifications and assessments in England. Ofqual controls entry to the regulated market and has rules and guidance for awarding organisations to make sure regulated qualifications are fit for purpose, valid and delivered securely.

Ofqual has a common set of rules for all qualifications regulated by us called the [General Conditions of Recognition](#). There are additional rules and guidance that are specific to certain qualifications, for example GCSEs, AS, A levels, Technical Qualifications within T Levels and Technical Awards.

A full list of Ofqual's rules and guidance, and the qualifications they apply to, can be found on [Ofqual's website](#).

Not all qualifications are regulated by Ofqual. You can find information on the organisations and the qualifications that Ofqual regulates in the [Register of Regulated Qualifications](#). Where a qualification is not regulated by Ofqual, you should contact the awarding organisation for further information.

Ofqual does not regulate schools or colleges, so we do not place any requirements directly on them. Some of Ofqual's rules cover how awarding organisations should interact with schools and colleges. This can include awarding organisations requiring schools and colleges to take on roles in the delivery and conduct of assessments. For example, the secure storage and handling of exam materials. This reflects the important role schools and colleges play in making sure the qualifications system works effectively and fairly.

Department for Education

The [Department for Education](#) is responsible for curriculum, funding and accountability requirements for schools and colleges. It also sets the subject content for [GCSEs](#), [AS and A levels](#) and [awards T Level certificates](#) once the whole T Level programme has been completed.

Skills England

[Skills England](#) works with partners to create better skills for better jobs, enabling growth and opportunity. This includes co-creating and refining a set of education and training products, including occupational standards, apprenticeships and technical qualifications.

Awarding organisations

In this guide references to awarding organisations mean all organisations that offer qualifications and are regulated by Ofqual.

Some awarding organisations offer VTQs which count towards the Department for Education's performance tables. These qualifications include:

- applied generals
- tech levels
- Technical Certificates
- Technical Awards
- Technical Qualifications within T Levels
- Alternative Academic Qualifications

Exam boards

Awarding organisations that also offer GCSEs, AS and A levels are known as exam boards. Exam boards must follow additional rules covering these qualifications.

There are 4 exam boards recognised by Ofqual to award GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in England:

- [AQA](#)
- [Cambridge OCR](#)
- [Pearson](#)
- [WJEC Eduqas](#)

Exam boards develop and award GCSEs, AS and A levels based on the subject content set out by the Department for Education and following Ofqual's [General Conditions of Recognition](#), [subject level and qualification level conditions](#).

For some aspects of the qualification system the exam boards work together. For example, they jointly plan the summer exam timetable to minimise clashes. When

the exam boards work together in this way, they generally do so through the [Joint Council for Qualifications \(JCQ\)](#), their membership body.

Where we refer to 'exam boards' in this guide, it is because the content or context only relates to GCSE, AS and A levels.

Schools and colleges

Schools and colleges play an integral role in the delivery of examinations and assessments throughout the year. While schools and colleges are customers of awarding organisations, they are a guardian of both the integrity of the system and the validity of qualifications. Your role, conducting exams and assessments ethically and reporting malpractice, for example, is central to this.

Private candidates

Some students will not be studying for their qualifications at a school or college and will be private candidates. Private candidates are often home educated or are re-taking a qualification after leaving school or college. They may be studying with a distance learning provider, tutor, parent, or independently. Private candidates need to register at a school, college or other exam centre to sit the assessments required by their qualification.

You may be contacted by students, parents or carers to ask whether your school or college offers entries for private candidates. It is up to an individual school or college to decide whether they accept private candidates. A school or college that accepts private candidates for a qualification must offer to provide all aspects of non-exam assessment for that qualification, if required by the candidate, as well as the exams. You should discuss a private candidate's requirements, including any access arrangements or Reasonable Adjustments that they may need, with them when agreeing to enter them for a qualification.

For GCSE, AS and A level exams, [JCQ has a list of schools, colleges and other centres](#) that accept exam entries for private candidates. This list is updated annually at the end of the calendar year. Not all schools or colleges that accept private candidates are recorded on JCQ's list. If your school or college accepts private candidates but is not included in the list, please register with JCQ.

Exams and assessment arrangements for the academic year 2025 to 2026

2026 vocational and technical qualification (VTQ) results arrangements

Ofqual has established measures to ensure students taking VTQs get their results on time. This is part of Ofqual's ongoing commitment that students taking VTQs in subjects such as engineering, health and social care and digital media, should have parity of treatment with those taking A levels or GCSEs.

These continued arrangements strengthen and embed processes for schools, colleges and awarding organisations.

- Awarding organisations will work with you to identify which students need a result on or before results days in August for progression to further or higher education. This term-time checkpoint will be completed before the main exam season begins in May.
- The checkpoint and arrangements for issuing results to you apply to Level 3, Level 1/2 and Level 2 VTQs used for progression to higher or further education. This is to ensure students taking qualifications alongside GCSEs or A Levels also receive their results when they need them. Awarding organisations will provide details of which qualifications are included.
- Awarding organisations will release these results to schools and colleges before results days to give sufficient time for exams officers to check and prepare them for final release. Awarding organisations will confirm their own key dates, including the delivery of results, directly to schools and colleges later in the autumn term.
- Results for these qualifications will be issued to students on or before A level and Level 3 results day and GCSE and Level 2 results day, as appropriate.
- [Ofqual's VTQ Information Hub](#) will bring together key dates and deadlines from awarding organisations, to support school and college staff working in the administration or delivery of these qualifications.

Ofqual recognises that individual students' plans can change. The checkpoint

process is designed to ensure that students who need a result on results days get one. This process should not restrict the flexibility that is a valued feature of many VTQs. Students who do not need a result in August to progress will continue to be able to complete their qualification as they are ready and to the timescales that work for them and their school or college. If a student no longer expects a result once the checkpoint process is complete, you should notify the relevant awarding organisation to make sure the student's progress is captured and, if appropriate, their result is deferred.

Please work with awarding organisations to understand their deadlines and your contribution to the successful delivery of results.

Exams and assessments in 2026

Newly introduced specifications in GCSE French, German and Spanish

Reformed versions of GCSE French, German and Spanish have been available for teaching since September 2024 and are to be awarded for the first time in summer 2026. As with the previous versions, these GCSEs are tiered with students sitting all of their assessments at either the higher or foundation tier. Schools will likely be reflecting on what changes to these qualifications might mean for the tier on which students should be entered.

When qualifications are reformed, we require exam boards to put in place measures that protect against students being unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged based on whether they sat the outgoing or incoming specifications. This will be the case for these new qualifications in summer 2026.

We anticipate that overall results in GCSE French, German and Spanish this summer are likely to be broadly similar to results in previous years. Therefore, to determine the proportion of students from your school that you should enter on each tier, you should consider their ability compared to your cohorts in previous years. If the ability of students in your school is similar to previous years, a reasonable assumption is that the distribution of grades may also be similar this summer. In these circumstances, entering a similar proportion of entries on each

of the two tiers is likely to be appropriate.

To determine the tier on which individual students should be entered, evidence from classroom assessments (including that from sample assessments for the new qualifications) should be used for the purposes of ranking students, as would be typical in any other year.

Support materials for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science

In 2024, the Department for Education confirmed that students taking exams in 2025, 2026 and 2027 will not be expected to memorise all the usual formulae and equations in GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science.

Students will be provided with support materials in the form of formulae and equation sheets for GCSE mathematics, physics and combined science exams in 2026. The support materials will set out the formulae and equations that students must memorise in a normal year, as set out in the DfE's subject content.

Exam boards will publish the formulae and equation sheets for the exams in 2026 in December 2025 so that students may become familiar with them before the exams. Exam boards will provide clean copies of these sheets with the exam papers.

The formulae and equation sheets to be used in the 2026 exams will be the same as those used for exams in 2025.

Tech Awards and the terminal rule

The terminal rule applies to all awarding organisations delivering Tech Awards, which are Key Stage 4 qualifications taken alongside GCSEs in subjects such as performing arts and health and social care.

The terminal rule requires the externally assessed component to be taken at the end of the qualification. No other assessment can be taken after the externally assessed component.

Non-exam assessment (NEA) units can be submitted in the same series as the externally assessed component, or an earlier series.

If you are not sure about the ordering of NEA and examined units, speak to the awarding organisation.

Resilience arrangements

The government does not expect there to be a situation where exams do not go ahead, but it is sensible to have contingency plans in place, even for extremely unlikely scenarios.

Long-term resilience arrangements continue to be in place, and schools and colleges should ensure that appropriate arrangements are established to gather evidence of student performance that would be used to determine grades in the unlikely event that exams and assessments could not go ahead as planned. Evidence should be collected in line with Ofqual's [published guidance](#) for GCSE, AS and A level, project qualifications and advanced extension awards. Schools and colleges should avoid over-assessment, with one set of mocks likely to be sufficient for evidence purposes.

For VTQs and other qualifications used alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels, awarding organisations provide guidance where needed. VTQs are generally modular and have a high proportion of internal assessment so it is more likely that there would already be assessment evidence available which could be used to determine grades. However, there are some qualifications that are used alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels for progression to further or higher study, where there may not be any or sufficient evidence available. If you are unsure whether evidence is needed for a specific VTQ you should check with the relevant awarding organisation.

Before exams and assessments

Contingency arrangements

Ofqual has worked with CCEA and Qualifications Wales to produce the [joint exam system contingency plan](#) setting out what schools and colleges should do if exams

or other assessments were seriously disrupted and includes guidance on developing contingency plans. Examples of disruption could include severe weather, widespread illness, travel disruption, cyber-attacks or system failures. Schools and colleges should follow the published guidance, and in be aware of their responsibilities in relation to developing contingency plans or any actions needed should they experience disruption.

Cyber security

Schools and colleges have an important role in maintaining the integrity of exams and assessments. This includes managing the safe storage and distribution of exam materials.

A [2025 poll of teachers](#) from over 2,000 secondary schools and colleges in England found that 29% experienced a cyber incident in the past academic year, compared with 34% in 2023 to 2024. Despite this, the time taken for schools to recover from cyber incidents has worsened. The poll also found that the proportion of teachers who received cyber security training rose from 61% during the academic year 2023 to 2024 to 72% in 2024 to 2025.

All schools and colleges should meet the [DfE's cyber security standards](#).

The National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) provides cyber security guidance and support in how to avoid computer security threats. Schools and colleges can visit the [NCSC's resource page](#) to find accessible resources and guidance to help improve cyber security.

Speak to the relevant awarding organisation if you have concerns.

Access arrangements (including Reasonable Adjustments)

Access arrangements is a term often used to describe changes made to an assessment, or to the way the assessment is taken, that allow students with specific needs, such as disabilities, special educational needs or temporary injury or illness, to access the assessment without changing the demands of the assessment.

Access arrangements provided for disabled students, to address disadvantage caused by their disability, are generally provided as Reasonable Adjustments. Awarding organisations have a legal duty to provide Reasonable Adjustments for disabled students under the Equality Act 2010.

Awarding organisations may also provide access arrangements where a student experiences a temporary illness or injury, or some other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment. This type of access arrangement is provided as Special Consideration. There are other forms of Special Consideration – see this section.

The same access arrangements may be provided as a Reasonable Adjustment or in cases of temporary illness or injury. For example, the use of a scribe may be provided as a Reasonable Adjustment for a disabled student or as a temporary access arrangement for a student with a broken arm during the exam period.

What access arrangements (including Reasonable Adjustments) are available

Awarding organisations can make a wide range of adjustments to their exams or assessments. Some of the most common adjustments are:

- modified papers (for example, large print or braille exam papers)
- access to assistive software (for example, voice recognition systems or computer readers)
- access to a scribe or human reader
- changes to how the assessment is completed (for example, word-processing rather than hand-writing answers)
- extra time and supervised rest breaks to complete assessments

This is not an exhaustive list, and other adjustments may be available, depending on the student's needs but not all these adjustments will be reasonable in all cases.

If you think a student needs an adjustment that is not commonly put in place by awarding organisations, you should contact the awarding organisation to discuss the student's needs as soon as possible. Should a student's needs change, meaning agreed adjustments may no longer be appropriate, you should contact the awarding organisation as soon as possible.

Where, in exceptional circumstances, you cannot identify suitable Reasonable Adjustments that would allow a student to sit their examinations, it may be possible to consider alternative assessment arrangements for the student. When you think a student may require alternative assessment arrangements, you should contact the awarding organisation as soon as possible.

Each awarding organisation will have its own Reasonable Adjustments policy, published on its website.

For GCSEs, AS, A levels and some VTQs, JCQ (on behalf of its members) sets out guidance on [access arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments](#). JCQ also publishes guidance on the access arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments process for centres accepting [private candidates](#).

How to apply for access arrangements, including Reasonable Adjustments

Schools and colleges need to process an application for some types of arrangement (for example, extra time or a scribe), using Access Arrangements Online, no later than the [deadline published](#) by JCQ.

Other arrangements, such as supervised rest breaks or non-electronic ear defenders, do not need an application. [JCQ guidance](#) explains what you need to do for the different types of arrangements and the evidence requirements.

Schools and colleges should contact individual awarding organisations for advice on adjustments for those VTQs not covered by JCQ regulations and T Levels.

If you become aware that a student's needs have changed or they need an access arrangement that has not been applied for, you should contact your awarding organisation as soon as possible. You should do this even if any deadline set by your awarding organisation has passed.

Reasonable Adjustments

Reasonable Adjustments, often called access arrangements, are changes made to exams or assessments, or to the way they are conducted, where a disabled student

would, because of their disability, otherwise be at a substantial disadvantage when demonstrating their skills, knowledge and understanding in an assessment. The exam or assessment must still test the same knowledge, skills and understanding for that qualification.

What awarding organisations must do

The [Equality Act 2010](#) requires awarding organisations to make Reasonable Adjustments to exams and assessments for disabled students. Ofqual requires awarding organisations to publish clear arrangements for making Reasonable Adjustments, including how a student qualifies for a Reasonable Adjustment and what Reasonable Adjustments might be made.

Ofqual has the power under the Equality Act to specify adjustments which an awarding organisation should not make in relation to particular qualifications. This is set out in Ofqual's [section 96 specifications](#).

What 'disabled' or 'disability' means

The Equality Act 2010 defines disability as: "a physical or mental impairment that has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on [the] ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities". Some long-term progressive conditions are also considered disabilities within the meaning of the Act.

A short-term illness or temporary injury is not considered a disability so a student who is temporarily ill or injured is not normally entitled to Reasonable Adjustments. Where a student experiences short-term or temporary injury or illness, they may be entitled to another type of access arrangement (which would technically be a form of Special Consideration).

What Reasonable Adjustments a student may get

The Reasonable Adjustments made for an individual student will depend on how – and by how much – their disability affects them when taking a particular assessment. By their nature Reasonable Adjustments are specific to an individual

student and decisions relating to them should be made on a case-by-case basis.

That means:

- different students with the same disability will not always get the same adjustments
- the same student might get different adjustments for different assessments
- if a student's disability doesn't affect their ability to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do in an assessment, they may not need any adjustments

An awarding organisation must decide, based on each student's circumstances, which (if any) adjustments are reasonable. Factors they should consider when making that decision include:

- how, and by how much, a student's disability affects their ability to demonstrate their knowledge, skills and understanding in the assessment
- how well an adjustment helps a student deal with the difficulties their disability causes when taking their assessment – an adjustment that works well is more likely to be reasonable than one that doesn't really help
- how much the adjustment would cost – a more expensive adjustment may be less likely to be reasonable than a cheaper one
- how difficult it is to make the adjustment – a complicated adjustment may be less likely to be reasonable than a straightforward one
- whether (and by how much) the adjustment could compromise the validity of the assessment, such as changing what is being assessed - an adjustment that gives a disabled person an unfair advantage or disadvantages other students would probably not be reasonable
- whether [it would be inappropriate to make a particular adjustment, having regard to Ofqual's section 96 Specifications](#) in relation to the Reasonable Adjustment of general qualifications or as a result of the competence standard exemption in [section 53 of the Equality Act](#), for certain VTQs.

The role of schools and colleges in relation to Reasonable Adjustments

Schools and colleges apply for Reasonable Adjustments on behalf of their students. To evidence that a student is eligible for a Reasonable Adjustment, you will need to

demonstrate that:

- the student is disabled
- their disability would significantly disadvantage them in the assessment

You must also set out the adjustments you believe the student needs.

If you are unsure what adjustments might be appropriate for a disabled student, you should discuss their needs with the student and the awarding organisation as early as possible. The awarding organisation will be able to provide advice about the different adjustments that are available, and the evidence that would be needed for the application. Some adjustments, such as braille papers, take time to arrange so early notice is helpful to make sure there is sufficient time to implement any adjustments before the assessment.

[JCQ's deadline](#) for ordering modified papers using Access Arrangements Online is earlier than the deadline for processing applications for access arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments.

Schools and colleges are responsible for making sure that any adjustments agreed with the awarding organisation are put in place and used properly when students take their assessments. Schools and colleges have a duty to make Reasonable Adjustments for disabled students under the Equality Act. For more information, please see Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), [Technical guidance for schools in England](#).

Appealing against an awarding organisation's decision

Ofqual's rules mean awarding organisations must have a process in place for schools and colleges to appeal against an awarding organisation's decision about Reasonable Adjustments for a student. An awarding organisation should explain why it has decided not to give a student an adjustment or to give them a different adjustment from that requested. If a school or college does not agree with the awarding organisation's decision, it should follow the awarding organisation's appeal process. Ofqual will usually only consider complaints about an awarding organisation once the appeal has been concluded.

Ofqual does not have powers to investigate complaints or disputes about whether

awarding organisations have breached equalities law. Ofqual cannot, for example, determine whether or not an awarding organisation has discriminated against a disabled student. However, an awarding organisation that was found to have breached equality law may also have breached Ofqual's conditions of recognition, so we could take regulatory action.

If you believe a student has been discriminated against by an awarding organisation, the student or their parent can contact the [Equality Advisory and Support Service](#) for advice on their rights within the Equality Act.

Senior designated contacts in schools and colleges

Awarding organisations need to be able to contact schools and colleges if there are issues that might affect the awarding of a student's qualification. Most of these issues are addressed during term time using regular contacts, however some of these issues may occur outside term time.

You will need to identify at least one senior contact within your school or college who is responsible for exam and assessment delivery. The designated contact will be someone who you can escalate qualification-related issues to for resolution, can be contacted outside term time by awarding organisations and has the authority to access information as required. This person doesn't necessarily need to be the principal or head teacher and could be the same person or people for all awarding organisations. Awarding organisations will contact you with their exact requirements and maintain a record of these designated contacts.

This contact would only be used in the small number of cases where information is needed to award a qualification and the normal, established contact arrangements with exams officers for example, are unavailable. This contact must be available throughout the assessment series, before, during and after results are issued.

For more information, please see JCQ's [General Regulations for Approved Centres](#).

Entries and tiering

Ofqual does not set rules on how awarding organisations manage entries from

schools or colleges. Awarding organisations have their own arrangements and exam boards set [common deadlines through JCQ](#).

Awarding organisations may ask schools and colleges for early indications of their expected entries or registrations. Awarding organisations will work with you to identify which students studying a VTQ at Level 3, 2 or 1/2 taken alongside A levels or GCSEs, will need a result on or before results days in August for progression to higher or further education. This term-time checkpoint will be completed before the main exam season begins in May.

We encourage schools and colleges to give awarding organisations this information as soon as possible to help the system run efficiently and effectively.

Key dates for VTQs will be available on the [VTQ Information Hub](#).

Some GCSE subjects have different tiers of entry (foundation or higher). The subjects with tiers of entry are:

- maths
- combined science
- physics
- chemistry
- biology
- statistics
- modern foreign languages

Where GCSEs are tiered, it is important that students are entered appropriately. Available grades are:

- Foundation tier: 5 to 1 (5–5 to 1–1 in combined science)
- Higher tier: 9 to 4 (9–9 to 4–4 on combined science) with a narrow ‘safety net’ grade 3 (4–3 in combined science) for those students who just miss grade 4 (or 4–4); higher tier students who do not achieve enough marks for that safety net grade will receive an unclassified result (U)

A student who is expected to achieve a grade 4 or grade 5 should be entered for foundation tier. A grade 4 or 5 achieved at foundation tier is the same as a grade 4 or 5 achieved at higher tier. Exam boards are required to make sure that it is no easier or more difficult to achieve a grade 4 or 5 on higher or foundation tier. There is nothing on certificates showing the tier of entry.

You need to make sure that all students are entered for the correct exams and, if the exam is tiered, at the correct tier. If you have any concerns or corrections, you should contact the exam board as soon as possible.

During exams and assessments

Exam timetable

GCSE, AS and A level exams will be held between 7 May and 23 June 2026. Exam board timetables for the 2026 summer exam series of GCSEs, AS and A levels are available on the [JCQ website](#). Details of the timetables for internal and external assessments for VTQs can be found on the relevant awarding organisation's website. Examinations and assessments take place throughout the academic year.

Reporting an error in an exam paper or assessment

Errors in exam papers and assessments are rare, but they can occasionally happen. You should encourage your students to let you know immediately if they believe there may have been an error in their paper. If you think there is an error in an exam paper or assessment, including in any modified papers, you should contact the relevant awarding organisation immediately. Awarding organisations will determine whether an error has been made and the potential impact on students.

Awarding organisations consider, for example, whether the error will have stopped students being able to answer the question or complete the task, or whether students' performance in other questions might have been affected. Awarding organisations then decide the fairest way to proceed. This might include analysing how students answered the question or awarding all students full marks for the question.

Ofqual takes question paper errors seriously. We consider whether an awarding organisation's planned action is appropriate and fair, we may require it to take action to address the impact of the error on students and we consider [regulatory action](#) where appropriate.

Malpractice and maladministration

Malpractice affects qualification standards and confidence in qualifications. It undermines the hard work of students, teachers, and schools and colleges. Ofqual takes malpractice very seriously.

You should be alert to the risk of malpractice during exams and assessments. The most commonly reported malpractice instances include students bringing mobile phones or other communication devices into the exam room, using unauthorised notes or materials, plagiarism (including unacknowledged use of AI tools), and sharing or attempting to access question papers before an assessment. Schools and colleges should emphasise to students the rules around examinations and remind students that malpractice can lead to serious consequences, including disqualification.

Even if there is no deliberate wrongdoing, poor practice or maladministration (for example, giving students the wrong exam papers) can result in students being seriously disadvantaged.

Ofqual's rules for awarding organisations reflect how serious malpractice and maladministration can be. We require awarding organisations to do all they can to prevent malpractice and maladministration when developing, delivering, and awarding regulated qualifications. However, it can happen and, where there are plausible allegations, awarding organisations must find out whether malpractice or maladministration has happened.

When awarding organisations become aware of possible malpractice or maladministration, they should do all they can to prevent or where that is not possible minimise:

- any unfair impact on students
- any adverse impact on:
 - their ability to develop, deliver and award the qualification
 - the standard of the qualification
 - public confidence in qualifications

Ofqual also requires awarding organisations to:

- have, and comply with, written procedures for investigating malpractice and

maladministration

- make sure investigators have no personal interest in the outcome of their investigations
- do all they can to keep school or college arrangements for preventing and investigating malpractice and maladministration under review
- provide (on request) guidance to schools and colleges about how best to prevent, investigate and deal with malpractice and maladministration
- if malpractice or maladministration is found, do all they can to stop it happening again, and take proportionate action against those responsible
- inform schools, colleges and other awarding organisations that may be affected by any malpractice or maladministration they have found.

For further information on malpractice and maladministration including what might constitute such, relating to GCSEs, AS and A levels, please refer to [JCQ's Suspected Malpractice Policies and Procedures](#).

Awarding organisations offering VTQs will have their own malpractice and maladministration policy setting out clearly [their expectations](#) of schools and colleges, including what data they will be collecting, when and why, and any consequences for failing to meet their deadlines.

If you have concerns about exam and assessment activities in your school or college, or an awarding organisation, you can raise those concerns with Ofqual. Further information can be found below in the [Whistleblowing section](#) of this guide.

Artificial intelligence

It is important that schools and colleges are aware of the risks posed by the use of artificial intelligence (AI) relating to both exam and non-exam assessments. Students are not permitted to use AI to produce material for assessments which they take credit for as their own work. The JCQ guidance on [AI use in assessments: protecting the integrity of qualifications](#) provides details about the responsibilities of schools and colleges. This includes ensuring the authenticity of student work, that students must not misuse AI tools and must acknowledge any use of such tools to avoid committing malpractice.

Ofqual has [clarified with awarding organisations](#) that Ofqual's regulations do not permit the use of AI as the sole marker of student assessments. Ofqual's

regulations apply to all components of regulated qualifications, including non-exam assessment. When marking a non-exam assessment component of a regulated qualification, schools and colleges must not use AI as the sole marker.

Awarding organisation inspections

Awarding organisations check that schools and colleges are following their instructions, including through targeted visits. In some cases, these are carried out by JCQ's Centre Inspection Service (CIS). Ofqual requires awarding organisations to have a sanctions policy for when a school or college has breached its requirements. Sanctions include extra monitoring visits, use of awarding organisation invigilators or preventing a school or college from offering some or all of their qualifications.

JCQ publishes [guidance setting out how exam boards investigate potential malpractice](#) and the sanctions they may impose when malpractice is confirmed. Awarding organisations offering VTQs will have their own policies that cover inspection, investigation, and sanctions.

Ofqual will not normally be involved with the investigation. Where you think an awarding organisation has not followed published procedures, you can appeal against the finding. If you are dissatisfied with the awarding organisation's response, you can complain to Ofqual. Ofqual will usually only consider a complaint once the awarding organisation's own complaints and appeals procedures have been exhausted.

Your role in tackling malpractice

You have an important role to play in preventing, identifying and tackling malpractice.

Awarding organisations rightly expect you to take malpractice, and the risk of malpractice, seriously. They expect schools and colleges to have processes for investigating and dealing with allegations of malpractice. Awarding organisations have their own rules for when and how exams and other assessments are conducted, which you must follow. Any breach of these rules can undermine the fair conduct of assessments and the fair award of qualifications. This can result in assessed work being rejected, the school or college being sanctioned by the

awarding organisation, or both.

You must comply with awarding organisations' instructions to reduce the risk of errors and maladministration occurring, such as having two people present when opening exam papers.

You should also comply with any instructions about issuing results. For example, you must not give results to students before any embargo is lifted.

Reporting malpractice or maladministration

Schools and colleges should report any evidence or suspicions of malpractice to the relevant awarding organisation. They should report any errors or incidents of maladministration as soon as they are discovered.

Individuals can also report concerns to Ofqual under the Public Interest Disclosure Act 1998. This is often known as whistleblowing. In certain circumstances, this can provide protection when a person discloses concerns about practice where they work.

[Use this form to report malpractice or wrongdoing to Ofqual.](#)

Special Consideration

Special Consideration is any adjustment given to a student who temporarily experiences an illness, injury, or other event outside of their control at the time of the assessment which significantly affects their ability to:

- take an assessment
- demonstrate what they can do in an assessment

Special Consideration is only for things that happen immediately before or during an exam or assessment that have a material effect on a student's ability to take that exam or assessment, or on how they perform. To be eligible for Special Consideration, students must have been fully prepared for the assessment and have

covered the whole course.

Students are not eligible for Special Consideration because, for example, they did not cover the course due to joining the class part way through or their education was disrupted due to issues such as staff shortages, planned building work or lack of facilities. Assessments are designed to show what a student knows, understands, and can do, not what they could know, understand and could do if circumstances had been different. This is important so that the qualifications that students work hard to achieve maintain their value and users of qualifications, including universities and employers, can trust in the grades awarded.

What awarding organisations must do

Ofqual requires awarding organisations to:

- have clear arrangements for giving Special Consideration
- publish details of those arrangements, including what Special Consideration is available and how students qualify for it

Ofqual does not specify what Special Consideration awarding organisations should give, or how they should determine eligibility for it.

For GCSEs, AS and A levels, all the exam boards offer 3 different types of support for students who are affected by circumstances outside their control, all of which are types of Special Consideration:

1. changes to the way assessments are taken for students with temporary injuries or illnesses (referred to as 'access arrangements')
2. a small number of extra marks for students whose exam performance is affected by temporary illness, injury, indisposition, or an unforeseen incident
3. awarding the qualification even though the student was absent from an exam or formal assessment (a student must have completed at least one component to be eligible for this type of Special Consideration)

JCQ provides [more information about these different types of support](#).

For VTQs, awarding organisations may consider the same 3 types of support for students as set out above. Other types of support may be available depending on the student's circumstances and the individual qualification and assessment missed.

For example, in some cases, due to the flexibility of the assessment timings or the nature of the situation, it might be possible for the student to take their VTQ assessment later.

It might not be possible to apply Special Consideration for VTQs where an assessment requires the demonstration of practical competence, where the assessment criteria must be met in full or where the qualification confers a licence to practise. Your awarding organisation can explain what support they can offer and how to apply.

Your role

For all qualifications, if a student is unable to take one or more of their assessments, or to show what they know, understand or can do in their assessments, due to temporary illness, injury or some other event outside their control, you should notify the awarding organisation as soon as possible. Your awarding organisation can explain what support they can offer, and how to apply.

If a student feels unwell on the day of their exam or assessment, you should follow your own procedures and must notify the awarding organisation as soon as possible. You should not wait until the student has completed the assessments, or until after results are issued, before contacting the awarding organisation as this may mean the student misses out on any Special Consideration.

For GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2026, you should submit Special Consideration requests for exceptional circumstances, such as illness, at the time of the assessment to your awarding organisation by 1 July 2026. If for any reason you are unable to meet the deadline, then contact your awarding organisation as soon as possible. You can check key dates in the examination cycle on [JCQ's website](#), you may wish to read their [guidance on Special Consideration](#).

If you believe a student studying VTQs or T Levels is eligible for Special Consideration, you should follow the awarding organisation's process and any deadlines that are specified on their websites. For T Levels and VTQs offered through JCQ exam boards, the [JCQ guidance on Special Consideration](#) is applicable.

If a school or college does not agree with an awarding organisation's decision

Awarding organisations should explain why they have decided to grant a different Special Consideration to the one requested or have taken a decision not to provide a Special Consideration.

Our rules mean awarding organisations must have a process for appealing that decision and you should follow that process if you disagree with their decision. Ofqual will usually only consider complaints about an awarding organisation once the appeal has been concluded.

Administering exams

Awarding organisations must make sure schools and colleges have the information they need to hand out the right papers on the right day and under the right conditions. Schools and colleges must take particular care to store any exam and assessment materials securely to protect the confidentiality of the exams.

Ofqual requires awarding organisations to have written and enforceable agreements with schools and colleges that deliver any part of their qualifications, including administering exams and other assessments. The agreements must include that the school or college:

- assists the awarding organisation when it undertakes monitoring
- has a workforce that can deliver the qualification as the awarding organisation requires
- operates a complaints procedure for students

JCQ has produced [instructions for conducting examinations](#). It covers the range of requirements the exam boards place on schools and colleges, including:

- how exam papers must be stored
- checks which must be performed when the papers are delivered
- checking of equipment prior to assessments taking place

- who should be present to supervise opening of papers
- starting times for exams
- supervision of candidates who take exams earlier or later than timetabled
- using calculators
- using other resources, such as dictionaries
- conditions, equipment, and seating arrangements in the exam room
- invigilation arrangements
- what must be done at the start of the examination, including identifying candidates
- starting the exam
- how to supervise during the exam
- what to do when a candidate is late
- completing an attendance register
- what to do in the event of emergencies
- ending the exam and packing away
- sending the scripts back to the exam board

Exams officers and invigilators play an essential role in the smooth running of the exam system. Ofqual works closely with both The Exams Office and the National Association of Examinations Officers to support new and experienced exams officers throughout the assessment cycle.

You should ensure that contingency arrangements are in place should exams officers or invigilators be unable to attend on the day on an exam.

The Exams Office, in partnership with the National Association of Examinations Officers, has also produced the [Invigilator Recruitment and Vacancy map](#) to support schools and colleges in recruiting invigilators.

Non-exam assessment in GCSEs, AS and A levels

Some knowledge, skills and understanding are assessed through non-exam assessments.

Exam boards provide their own instructions for non-exam assessments. Where a

GCSE, AS or A level includes non-exam assessment, such as a dance or music performance, teachers should support their students to complete that assessment in line with the expectations set by exam boards. JCQ has also published detailed [guidance about how the exam boards operate their non-exam assessments](#) in GCSEs, AS and A levels, and what is expected of you.

The non-exam assessment will be marked and, where needed, moderated and combined with students' exam marks to determine their grades.

Exam boards check whether their rules are properly followed. They have different ways of doing this, including through general school or college (known as centre) inspection visits, subject-targeted visits, and statistical monitoring which shows where marks for non-exam assessments appear out of line with students' performance in their exams for that subject.

Non-exam and practical assessment in VTQs

Awarding organisations provide their own instructions for non-exam and practical assessments for VTQs. This includes marking, moderation and timescales for sending marks to the awarding organisation.

Awarding organisations check whether assessments are properly delivered through external quality assurance. Where the assessments are marked by schools or colleges, the awarding organisation checks whether its marking guidance has been followed, for example, through statistical monitoring. This means they can identify marks for non-exam or practical assessments that appear out of line with students' performance in their exams or other assessments for that subject.

After exams or assessments

Who marks students' work?

All exams are marked by markers who are recruited and paid by awarding organisations. Ofqual requires awarding organisations to make sure all assessors,

including any teachers marking their own students' non-exam assessments, understand how they must mark, and that marking is done accurately and to a consistent standard.

Non-exam assessment can be marked in different ways, for example, by teachers in the student's school or college or by visiting examiners. In some cases, it is sent to the awarding organisation for marking.

Where teachers mark their own students' work (an 'internally marked' assessment), schools and colleges are required to standardise marking between teachers within their school or college. Awarding organisations then check a sample of that marking – sometimes known as moderation. This is so they can make sure marking has been accurate and consistent across all schools and colleges. If the marking of the sample is in line with the national standard, then no change will be made to the marks given. However, if marking is found to be too strict, or too generous, marks will be adjusted to make sure students receive an accurate mark.

You should follow the [JCQ instructions for non-examination assessments](#) for GCSEs, AS and A levels, or instructions set by your awarding organisation when conducting and marking non-exam assessments.

For vocational and technical qualifications, you should follow the JCQ instructions applicable to [non-examination assessments for VTQS](#).

Student requests for a review of teacher-marked non-exam assessment

Schools and colleges are required to have specific arrangements for students to make a complaint for VTQs or request reviews of the marking of internal assessments for Technical Qualifications within a T Level. Awarding organisations will have an appeals policy setting out the process to follow.

For GCSEs, AS and A levels, schools and colleges must inform students of their teacher-marked non-exam assessment marks so they can request a review of marks before the marks are submitted to the awarding organisation. JCQ has published information about the [review of centre marks for general qualifications](#).

JCQ has published information about the [processes schools and colleges need to put in place](#) to meet this requirement. For other qualifications, schools and colleges should speak to the relevant awarding organisation.

How awarding organisations make sure marking is accurate

Awarding organisations meet Ofqual's rules – including making sure marking is as accurate as possible – in different ways. Their approach can depend on whether scripts are marked on paper or electronically (on-screen), as well as whether they are marked by question or as a whole paper. Awarding organisation approaches include using 'seed items' or requiring markers to submit samples of their marking to a more senior marker for checking.

'Seed' items

Where on-screen marking is used and scripts are split up into separate items (questions), most awarding organisations use a quality assurance method known as 'seeding'.

After the exam has taken place and before marking starts, senior examiners review and select a number of student responses known as 'seed' items. They then agree a mark for each seed item and a marking tolerance. Markers must mark within the tolerance of this mark.

If the mark for a seed item is outside the agreed tolerance the marker can be stopped from marking, either until they have completed further training or permanently. The marking they have already completed might also be re-marked or adjusted.

Requiring markers to submit samples of their marking to a more senior marker for checking

Where markers submit samples of their marking to a senior examiner for checking, the sample is checked to see if it falls within the agreed marking tolerance. If a marker is not marking to the required standard, they can be stopped from marking – either until they have completed further training, or permanently. The marking they have already completed might be remarked or adjusted.

If you would like more information on how an awarding organisation quality assures its marking, you should look on their website or contact them directly.

Moderation and verification

For some qualifications, teachers mark non-exam assessments. When they do this, awarding organisations must check the teachers' marking to make sure it is accurate and consistent. This is normally done by taking a sample of the marking of each school or college to see if their marking is in line with national standards. For GCSE, AS and A levels this process is known as moderation, for other qualifications it might be known as a check or standards verification.

To make this possible, schools and colleges provide a sample of their students' work to the awarding organisation. The sample is set by the awarding organisations to include a sufficient number and range of student work (given different marks) to allow them to make a secure judgement about the standard of the school or college's marking.

The awarding organisation reviews the marking of the work in the sample to check that the mark scheme has been applied accurately (to the correct standard) and consistently.

If the awarding organisation agrees with the marks, then the school or college's marks remain, and they are used to calculate the final qualification grades for the school or college's students.

Awarding organisations recognise that there may be some small legitimate differences in judgement between the school or college marker and the awarding organisation about the exact mark they judge a piece of work should receive. To reflect this, awarding organisations normally choose to put in place a small 'tolerance'. If an awarding organisation finds the difference between marks awarded by the school or college and those of the awarding organisation to be greater than the tolerance, they will judge the marking to be inaccurate.

If the awarding organisation finds that the marking is inaccurate and/or inconsistent (for example, some marks are accurate and others are not), or they cannot make a judgement about this from the sample they have reviewed, the awarding organisation must take action. The awarding organisation may look at a wider sample of work from that school or college to allow them to come to a judgement.

If the awarding organisation identifies that the marking is inaccurate but consistent – for example, the marks are consistently too low or too high – they will adjust the original marking to make sure students receive an accurate mark. Such an adjustment is applied to the work of all students in the school or college, not just those in the sample. The awarding organisation will have looked at a sufficiently wide sample of work to establish a consistent level of marking within the school or college.

If the awarding organisation finds that the marking is inconsistent, so that it is impossible to adjust the marks in a way that ensures students receive accurate marks, the awarding organisation will either:

- request and then re-mark all the work from the school or college
- ask the school or college to mark it again and then look again at the new marks given through the checking process

The awarding organisation will prepare a report for the school or college, which gives feedback on their marking. This report should allow the school or college to understand the reasons for any changes to their marking, made following moderation. This could help the school or college and/or identify any areas for improvement. Should it be necessary, it will also help the school or college decide whether to seek a review of any adjustment to the marks.

Grading

Grading for GCSEs, AS or A levels in 2026

Ofqual oversees exam boards to ensure that it is no more difficult to achieve a grade in a subject from one year to the next, and between different exam boards. This means that the standard of work to achieve a particular grade in 2026 will be comparable to summer 2025.

Grade boundaries often vary year to year, to reflect fairly any changes in how difficult the paper is. The quality of a student's work in their exams determines the grade they get and no-one is advantaged or disadvantaged by the year in which they happen to sit the exam.

There are no quotas for the number of students who must pass or fail a subject each year, and no cap on the number of students that can get each grade. The proportion of students receiving different grades does vary a little each year. But the standard of work required to receive a particular grade remains comparable.

More information about how grading works in GCSE, AS and A levels can be found in Ofqual's [Understanding grading toolkit for schools and colleges](#).

Grading arrangements for VTQs and Technical Qualifications within T Levels in the academic year 2025 to 2026

Well established grading arrangements for VTQs will continue, and awarding organisations will use suitable grading approaches for their qualifications.

Where qualifications are new, and in the first years of their awards, we ask awarding organisations to take into account the fact that teachers and students may be less familiar with new assessments when setting grade boundaries.

This will be the case for some Technical Qualifications within T Levels, and new Alternative Academic Qualifications.

Receiving results data

Schools and colleges receive GCSE, AS, A level and T Level results, from the awarding organisation, a day before the relevant results day. This early view of results is to allow schools and colleges to prepare results for student collection and must remain strictly confidential until release on results day. Awarding organisations may consider a breach of their embargo to be maladministration or malpractice.

Please make sure you have confirmed your school or college contact details with your awarding organisations before results day.

Awarding organisations will release results data for Level 3, Level 2 and Level 1/2 VTQs to schools and colleges before results days to give sufficient time for exams officers to check and prepare the results for final release. For Level 3, in most cases we expect this will mean results will be with you by the Monday of results week.

Some awarding organisations (such as AQA and WJEC) process and issue their VTQ results in a similar way to their GCSEs, AS and A levels and they will continue to issue results to schools and colleges the day before results day. This is in line with their release of GCSE, AS and A level results and the same is also likely to apply for other Level 2 results.

The ability of staff to review results and, if necessary, engage with awarding organisations before results days has proved a critical aspect of successful timely

delivery of results. If your school or college handles high volumes of results, consider which staff will need to be available to process these results, identify any issues and liaise with the relevant awarding organisation.

Some awarding organisations opt to issue results to schools and colleges under embargo. Where this occurs you must follow the instructions provided by the awarding organisation or JCQ, including who in your school or college is allowed to view the results early.

Many schools and colleges opt to release VTQ results to students on the same day as A level results, so there is an equal celebration for all students.

Ofqual's [VTQ Information Hub](#) brings together dates from the awarding organisations, including when results will be available in schools and colleges.

Results days for students

The date assessment results are released depends on the qualification in question, the way it has been assessed, and the awarding organisation.

Results for AS, A levels and T Levels taken in summer 2025 will be released to students on **Thursday 13 August 2026**.

Level 3 VTQs, used for progression to higher education, will be released to students on or before **Thursday 13 August 2026**.

Results for GCSEs taken in summer 2024 will be released to students on **Thursday 20 August 2026**.

Level 2 and Level 1/2 VTQs results used for progression to further education will be released to students on or before **Thursday 20 August 2026**.

Some VTQs are taken on demand or results issued on a rolling basis. Results for these qualifications will be available at different times throughout the year. You can find the date you will receive your students' qualification results on the relevant awarding organisation website and on the [VTQ Information Hub](#).

Results for GCSEs taken in November 2025 were released to students on **Thursday 8 January 2026**.

Reviews and appeals for GCSEs, AS, A levels and Technical Qualifications within T Levels

If you think there has been an error in the marking, or that an awarding organisation hasn't followed their processes properly there are processes you can follow to have these decisions reviewed. These processes are collectively known as post-result services.

This section sets out the process that awarding organisations have in place to comply with our conditions. For awarding organisation-specific dates and processes please refer to the awarding organisation's own website.

Awarding organisations may offer similar arrangements for VTQ performance table qualifications such as Tech Awards. Schools and colleges should contact the relevant awarding organisation directly to understand their reviews and appeals arrangements.

Stages of the reviews and appeals process

The reviews and appeals system for GCSEs, AS and A levels, and Technical Qualifications within T Levels is shown in the diagram and below. Ofqual's rules set out the way awarding organisations must carry out each stage.

Stages of the reviews and appeals system for GCSEs, AS, A levels and Technical Qualifications within T Levels

1. Results are issued by the awarding organisations.
2. A review of marking or moderation can be requested by the school or college if it thinks an error has been made. The awarding organisation will then review the marking or moderation and correct any errors.
3. The school or college can make an appeal on the grounds of a marking or moderation error that remains after the review, or on the grounds of a procedural error. The appeal is then initially considered by an officer at the awarding organisation.
4. An appeal hearing can be requested by the school or college if it is not satisfied with the outcome. The appeal will be considered by a panel at the awarding organisation. This is the final decision and it must involve someone independent

to the awarding organisation.

5. If the school or college is still not satisfied after the final appeal outcome, it can apply to Ofqual's Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) for a final review. Ofqual will consider whether something might have gone wrong.

You may wish to refer to the [JCQ information and guidance](#) on the timing and processes of post result services.

Schools and colleges are required to have arrangements in place for students to request reviews of the marking for GCSE, AS, A level and Technical Qualifications within a T Level, non-exam assessments prior to the submission of marks to an awarding organisation.

JCQ has published information about the [processes schools and colleges need to put in place](#) to meet this requirement. You should check the awarding organisation's website for their requirements.

You should speak to the relevant awarding organisation for information on their appeals process for VTQs such as Tech Awards.

Reviews of marking and moderation

For GCSE, AS, A level and Technical Qualifications within a T Level, schools and colleges can ask awarding organisations to review whether there were any errors in the awarding organisation's:

- marking of any exam or non-exam assessment
- moderation of a teacher-marked assessment

Ofqual's rules also allow (but do not require) awarding organisations to accept requests for reviews of marking directly from individual students. Each awarding organisation can decide whether – and, if so, in what circumstances – it will accept requests from students. Most awarding organisations choose not to accept requests directly from students. Where this is the case, schools and colleges must give students the opportunity to appeal against any decision they take not to ask the awarding organisation for a review of marking, and any decision they take not to seek access to a student's script. If a school or college (or a student, where the awarding organisation allows them to) requests a review, the awarding organisation must carry this out in line with Ofqual's rules and communicate the outcome of the review to the

school or college or student.

Private Candidates

Private candidates may request a review directly from the awarding organisation. Alternatively, a private candidate may ask the school or college, through which they entered for the qualification, to seek a review on their behalf.

Information to help decide whether to ask for a review

Awarding organisations must make mark schemes available to schools and colleges before their deadline for accepting reviews.

Schools, colleges and private candidates can ask awarding organisations to give them access to marked GCSE, AS and A level scripts (known as access to scripts service), and Technical Qualifications within T Level marked assessment materials. This can help them decide whether to ask for a review.

Awarding organisations set a deadline for the receipt of requests for marked scripts. If a script is requested by their deadline, they must provide a copy of the student's marked script in time for the school, college or private candidate to decide whether to ask for the marking to be reviewed.

Priority review of marking

A school or college can request a priority review of marking if the outcome of the review will be used to access further or higher education. Awarding organisations will aim to complete priority reviews by 3 September 2026 which is UCAS's advisory deadline for higher education providers to hold places open for students. Where a priority review has been requested, an awarding organisation may offer a different approach to its normal review process.

Reviews of exam scripts and other awarding organisation marked

assessments

When reviewing any assessment, it has marked itself (for GCSE, AS, A level and Technical Qualifications within a T Level), an awarding organisation must arrange for a reviewer to consider whether the original marker made any errors. Reviewers must be specifically trained to complete reviews, as the process of reviewing the way a question or paper has been marked is different to marking the question or paper afresh. Reviewers must not have been involved with the original marking of the student's assessment. Awarding organisations must monitor the way reviewers carry out reviews to make sure they are following our rules and acting consistently.

A reviewer must:

1. Consider the original marking.
2. Decide whether there were any administrative errors in the marking. An administrative error typically occurs when a marker misses a question or does not properly total the marks for all questions. If any such errors (however large or small) are found, they must be corrected, and the grade adjusted if necessary.
3. Check, for each task or question where there was only one possible right answer and therefore mark, whether the right mark was given for the student's answer. If the marker made an error when marking any such question, the reviewer must remark the question (however large or small the error). The new mark replaces the original one.
4. Decide, for questions or tasks where a range of responses can earn credit, whether the original mark could have been given by a marker who properly applied the mark scheme to the answer and exercised his or her academic judgement in a reasonable way. An error is likely to have been made if the reviewer concludes:
 - a) that the original mark was unduly lenient or harsh, given the correct application of the mark scheme
 - b) a marker who had the appropriate subject knowledge and who had been trained to use the mark scheme would have been acting unreasonably in giving the mark
 - c) there was no rational basis for the mark
5. Re-mark the questions in respect of which the errors were made, however large or small the effect of the error.

If the reviewer finds a marking error, the reviewer's mark will replace the original mark and the awarding organisation must change the grade if necessary. Any new mark and grade awarded after the review could be higher or lower than that originally given. If the reviewer does not find a marking error, the original mark must not be

changed. The awarding organisation must tell the school or college, or student (where the request was accepted from an individual), the outcome of the review and must provide a reason for their decision.

Occasionally, a reviewer might find 2 or more different errors on review which, when corrected, result in no overall mark change, because they cancel each other out.

If the review raises questions about the accuracy of other students' results (including for Technical Qualifications within T Levels), the awarding organisation must extend the review to other students' papers that may have been affected. Where an awarding organisation discovers an incorrect result they will take appropriate action, having regard to any guidance published by Ofqual.

Reviews of moderation

A school or college can ask for the outcome of an awarding organisations' moderation to be reviewed by the awarding organisation if the moderation resulted in a change to the marks the school or college gave to the work. Awarding organisations do not provide reviews where the marks given by a centre were not changed following moderation. The request for a review of moderation must be made on behalf of the whole of the school or college's cohort for that component.

The awarding organisation will ask someone trained to do so to review the decisions taken by the original moderator. The reviewer will look at the sample of work the original moderator reviewed to consider whether the moderator made any errors.

As with reviews of exam marking, the reviewer will judge that there was an error if they conclude that:

- there was an administrative error
- any of the moderation decisions were unduly lenient or harsh
- any of the moderation decisions were unreasonable, from the point of view of a moderator who had the appropriate subject knowledge and who had been trained to moderate the assessment
- there was no rational basis for the moderation outcome

The awarding organisation must make sure that any adjustments applied as a result of the original moderation were appropriate. If the reviewer does not find a moderation error and the awarding organisation judges any adjustments made were

appropriate, the awarding organisation must not change the outcome.

If the reviewer finds an error in the original moderation and/or judges any adjustment made to be inappropriate, the awarding organisation must correct this. Also, where necessary, the awarding organisation must adjust students' marks so that all students receive an accurate mark and, where required, adjust students' grades.

If a review of moderation finds that a student had been given a grade that was too high, Ofqual has set a rule that means the student's grades will not be lowered. This is because the review affects many students, and schools and colleges are unlikely to be able to get permission from everyone for a review to take place. There is no equivalent protection where a grade is judged to be too high in other circumstances, for example, if the awarding organisation finds it issued the wrong result due to an administrative error.

Reasons for the outcome of a review

Ofqual requires awarding organisations to automatically provide reasons for the outcome of a review. Awarding organisations will have their own ways of providing reasons for review outcomes

Appeals

If you remain concerned about an outcome following a review, you can appeal to the awarding organisation. Appeals for any qualification can be made on the grounds that:

- an awarding organisation did not apply its procedures consistently or did not follow procedures properly and fairly

For GCSEs, AS and A levels (as well as project qualifications), and Technical Qualifications within T Levels, appeals can also be made on the basis that:

- there was an error in the original marking, or in the review of that marking – that is, that:
 - an administrative error (such as adding up marks incorrectly) had not been corrected
 - the mark scheme was not properly applied
 - the mark could not have been given by a trained marker, who had appropriate subject knowledge, and who had exercised their academic judgement in a

reasonable way

- there was an error in the original moderation, or in the review of that moderation – that is, that:
 - an administrative error (such as adding up marks incorrectly) had not been corrected
 - any of the moderation decisions were unreasonable, from the point of view of a moderator who had the appropriate subject knowledge and who had been trained to moderate the assessment
- there was no rational basis for the moderation outcome

Appeals can also be made in respect of:

- decisions regarding requests for Reasonable Adjustments and Special Consideration
- decisions regarding actions taken following an investigation into malpractice or maladministration

The setting of a grade boundary cannot be the subject of an appeal.

An awarding organisation must make sure that those making appeal decisions are competent to do so and have no personal interest in the outcome. They must not have been involved in the original marking or moderation or the review of the marking or moderation. The final decision must involve at least one decision maker who is not connected to the awarding organisation.

Ofqual's rules allow (but do not require) awarding organisations to accept appeals directly from individual students. Each awarding organisation can decide whether – and, if so, in what circumstances – to accept appeals from students. Most awarding organisations choose not to accept appeals directly from students. Where this is the case, awarding organisations must make sure schools or colleges give students the chance to appeal if they decide against asking the awarding organisation for further action.

If a school or college (or a student, where the awarding organisation allows them to) seeks an appeal, the awarding organisation must carry out the appeal in line with Ofqual's rules and communicate the outcome of the appeal to the school or college, or student.

An awarding organisation may choose to offer the school or college (or individual student whose appeal was accepted by the awarding organisation) the opportunity to

attempt to resolve the disagreement without the need for a full and formal appeal hearing. This is not something Ofqual requires, and the opportunity for a full appeal must remain available.

Each VTQ awarding organisation will have its own appeals policy. You should check any specific details directly with the relevant awarding organisation.

Private candidates

Private candidates may appeal directly to the awarding organisation. Alternatively, a private candidate may ask the school or college, through which they entered for the qualification, to appeal on their behalf.

Review of other administrative decisions

Schools and colleges can request a review of an administrative decision where an awarding organisation has made a decision involving an element of judgement which has affected a student's results. For example, some decisions could be taken in cases of very late arrival or missing scripts. A school or college should request a review of an administrative decision directly from the awarding organisation.

Timelines for reviews and appeals

Each awarding organisation must set and publish its own timelines, including the deadlines by which requests for a review or an appeal must be received.

Ofqual's rules do not specify set dates for the completion of reviews and appeals but do set out minimum timescales that awarding organisations must meet. These ensure common, minimum timelines for students and schools or colleges.

Fees

Awarding organisations can charge a fee for reviews of marking, reviews of

moderation and considering an appeal. They must publish the fees they will charge and be clear about any circumstances in which they will not charge.

The Exam procedures review service

Schools and colleges that are not satisfied with the result of an appeal can ask Ofqual to review the case through [the Exam procedures review service \(EPRS\)](#). We will look at whether the awarding organisation has followed our rules and its own procedures correctly. Ofqual will not review or remark a student's work as part of the EPRS process.

We cannot tell the awarding organisation to change a student's grade. The grade will only change if the awarding organisation decides the grade was wrong and needs to be corrected. It is important to remember that a new grade could be higher or lower.

EPRS is only available for:

- GCSEs, AS and A levels
- Technical Qualifications within a T Level
- Level 3 Project qualifications (EPQ)

Applications to EPRS can only be made by schools or college, or directly in the case of private candidates (such as home-educated students). Applications can only be made once the awarding organisation's appeal process has been completed. Applications should be made within 15 working days of receiving the final appeal decision from the awarding organisation.

For more information about EPRS [please contact us](#).

Resits

For GCSE English language and GCSE mathematics, exams are available in November, but only for students who were aged 16 or above on 31 August of that year.

As most exams for GCSEs, AS and A levels take place in May or June each year, students who want to resit these exams would need to wait until the following

summer to do so.

Some VTQs operate assessments throughout the year. Students may be able to take their assessment again, at the next available opportunity. Please contact your awarding organisation for details.

Complaints

Ofqual wants all users of organisations and qualifications we regulate to receive a good service and to have things put right when they go wrong. We encourage you to contact us through [our online portal](#) if something has gone wrong.

We may require some specific information to help us investigate your complaint and we will help you through this process.

You will be able to give details of your complaint or concern and attach documents within this service. You can use our portal to:

- make a complaint
- report a concern of wrongdoing, risk or malpractice
- raise a concern as a whistleblower
- manage an existing complaint or concern

You can report your concerns via our [malpractice reporting procedure](#).

Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing to Ofqual is one way in which a member of staff in a school or college can raise a concern about wrongdoing, risk or malpractice. This may relate to:

- exams, such as GCSEs and A levels
- assessment of VTQs listed on the [Register of Regulated Qualifications](#)
- activities of exam boards or awarding organisations which we regulate

We encourage you to contact Ofqual if you wish to raise a concern (called 'making a

disclosure’) about the activities of awarding organisations and the qualifications they offer. If you want to ‘blow the whistle’ to us, we encourage you to:

1. read the [GOV.UK page on whistleblowing](#)
2. report the concerns to your employer first, if you feel that you are able to
3. seek independent legal advice to satisfy yourself that you are protected by law, if you wish to report to Ofqual
4. make sure what you are reporting counts as whistleblowing

You can find more information on whistleblowing in Ofqual’s [whistleblowing policy](#).

Further information and useful links

Ofqual

You can find the most up to date information about the arrangements for 2025 to 2026 on our [Latest updates from Ofqual](#) page.

The [Ofqual student guide to exams and assessments](#) is now available for all students.

Ofqual’s [grading toolkit](#) is designed for headteachers and teachers to understand and explain how GCSE and A level qualifications are graded.

Ofqual’s [YouTube channel](#) contains videos about exam and assessment arrangements.

The following resources are available to support exams officers in their roles:

- [Ofqual resources to support exams officers](#)
- [The Exams Office’s support materials](#)
- [JCQ’s Exams Office section](#)

For public enquiries: [contact Ofqual](#)

Public enquiry phone line: 0300 303 3344.

Our phone line is normally open from 9am to 5pm on weekdays. Please check our website for opening times on and after results days.

If you want to complain to Ofqual about an exam board or awarding organisation, for example, because you think they have not followed either their own policies and procedures or Ofqual's rules, please follow our [complaints procedure](#). We would usually expect you to give the awarding organisation a chance to resolve your complaint by using their complaints process before coming to us.

Joint Council for Qualifications

[The Joint Council for Qualifications \(JCQ\)](#) is the exam boards' membership organisation (AQA, OCR, Pearson and WJEC). Exam boards use JCQ to set common policies and procedures that schools and colleges must follow.

JCQ's members also include Council for the Curriculum, Examinations & Assessment (CCEA), City and Guilds, NCFE and the Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA), developing and delivering many VTQs in England.

JCQ has produced [information for candidates](#) so that your students are fully prepared and understand the regulations. This includes an exam day checklist and social media information.

JCQ has also published [its updated instructions for conducting examinations](#) to enable all schools and colleges to administer examinations and assessments consistently and securely so that the integrity of the assessment process can be maintained.

Information and contact: [JCQ website](#)

National Careers Service

The [National Careers Service](#) provides free and impartial careers advice, information and guidance, including on T Levels and VTQs.

UCAS

[UCAS, the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service](#), is the UK's shared admissions service for higher education.

For any questions about higher education application and admissions, you should contact the relevant institution directly.

Telephone: 0371 468 0 468

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6pm.

Equality Advisory and Support Services

[Equality Advisory and Support Service \(EASS\)](#) advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, across England, Scotland and Wales.

Telephone: 0808 800 0082

Lines are open from 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday and 10am to 2pm on Saturdays. Calls are free from landlines and most mobile numbers.

Mental health support for students

Students may find it helpful to read our [resources on preparing for exams](#) – including Ofqual's [guide to coping with exam pressure](#) and our blog on [what schools can do about exam and test anxiety](#).

Other organisations

[Childline](#) is a service provided by the NSPCC offering confidential support and advice to children and young people.

[Mind](#) is a charity providing mental health support for anyone experiencing a mental health problem.

[Young Minds](#) is a charity working to improve emotional well-being and mental health among children and young people.

[Children and young people’s mental health services \(CYPMHS\)](#) are services that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their mental health or wellbeing.

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