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Decisions on how GCSE, AS and A level grades will be determined in summer 2021 and the awarding of VTQs and other general qualifications

Below is a summary of the announcement made by the Department for Education on 25th February on the arrangements for students to receive their grades this summer.

GCSE, AS and A levels

Assessment and evidence

Teachers will be required to make a holistic judgement of each student's performance on a range of evidence relating to the subject content that has been delivered by their teacher (either in the classroom or via remote learning). Additional information/guidance includes:

- Teachers must assess their students' performance, only on what content has been delivered to them by their teachers, to determine the grade each student should receive.
- Teachers can use evidence of a student's performance from throughout the course to inform their judgement.
- Teachers should determine the grades as late in the academic year as is practicable, and not confined to a defined window, to enable teaching to continue for as long as possible.
- Schools and colleges will be required to use a broad range of evidence across the taught content to determine the grades before submitting the grades to the exam boards.
- Heads of centres will have to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to allow progression to the next stage of their education, although we will not set requirements about the minimum amount of content that students must have been taught.
- Students should continue to work on their non-exam assessment (NEA), including for Project qualifications. NEA will be marked by teachers and will contribute to the overall grade, whether or not it has been completed.
- Teachers should mark the NEA according to the normal mark scheme (in whole or in part, depending on whether students have been able to complete their NEA).
- Exam boards will not be required to moderate teachers' marking of NEA this year.
- In GCSE, AS and A level art and design, the student's grade must be based on the portfolio only, whether or not it has been completed. Students will not be penalised if, due to circumstances beyond their control, they were unable to complete their portfolio.
- In GCSE English language, GCSE modern foreign languages and A level sciences (biology, chemistry, physics and geology), centres will be required to determine and submit a separate grade or result for the endorsement. This result or grade will be

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based on work that has been completed towards the endorsement. No recordings or separate evidence of performance will be required.

- Private candidates should work with a centre to provide evidence in line with the sort of evidence that other students will produce
- Overall, it will be no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years.

Support materials

Exam boards will provide a package of support materials to include questions, mark schemes, data about how students typically performed in individual questions and exemplar materials, as well as advice for teachers about content coverage, topic selection, marking and making grading judgements. This will be based on past questions and will include a proportion of previously unpublished questions for every subject.

Teachers will be able to use the support materials immediately following publication and until the deadline for the submission of grades. Use of these exam board support materials is not compulsory; they will be part of the range of evidence teachers could use to determine the grade.

Quality assurance

Exam boards will work together as far as possible to ensure that requirements for internal quality assurance (QA) and arrangements for external QA are consistent.

Internal QA arrangements:

- Centres' internal QA arrangements will include consideration of the centre's profile of results in previous years as a guide to help them to check that their judgements are not unduly harsh or lenient.

External QA arrangements:

- Exam boards will put in place arrangements for external QA to check each centre's internal QA process and, in a sample of centres, to review the evidence for one or more subjects. Sampling will be both random, risk-based, and focused on making sure that the process and evidence used by centres to determine a grade is reasonable; it will not involve second-guessing teachers' judgements.
- Exam boards will carry out more detailed checks of a sample of centres, reviewing the evidence for one or more subjects. Some centres will be selected from a random sample that is representative of different centre types and some will be selected based on risk.
- Exam boards will process the grades submitted by centres only after completing, and being satisfied with, any external QA.

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Changes to grades will only be made if exam boards find that the grade is not a reasonable exercise of academic judgement, rather than as a result of marginal differences of opinion, and only following discussion between the exam board and the centre.

Head of centre declaration

Exam boards will require centres to submit a declaration by the head of centre, confirming that the requirements for internal quality assurance have been met. A number of other assurances will be included in this declaration, including confirmation that students had been studying for the course (to mitigate the risk of inappropriate entries) and to confirm sufficient content coverage. The head of centre declaration will include at least the following points:

- The centre considers the grades to be accurate.
- Any information given by the centre about the evidence relied on is accurate and takes into account evidence from other centres a student has attended.
- The centre has completed QA as specified by the exam board and their own internal procedures.
- Students entered were those who were already studying the course and had intended to enter for the qualification.
- Students have completed sufficient content to enable them to progress to the next stage of their education.
- The centre is satisfied that work completed by each student is their own.
- Where students required access arrangements or reasonable adjustments these were provided, with appropriate input from the SENCo and/or other specialists.
- The centre has taken note of any guidance issued by the exam boards about how to minimise bias and discrimination and is confident that their judgements are fair.
- The evidence and all relevant records are available for inspection.

Appeals and results

A summary of information relating to appeals and results includes:

- Students will be able to appeal their grade.
- A student who is unhappy with their grade will first ask their centre to check whether an administrative or procedural error had been made.
- Where a centre does identify an error in the grade submitted to the exam board, it can submit a revised grade and a rationale for the board to consider. If the exam board is satisfied with the rationale, it will issue a revised grade.
- Where a centre does not believe an error had been made, a student can ask the centre to appeal to the exam board on their behalf. The centre will submit the student's appeal to the exam board and provide the evidence on which its judgement had been made; the exam board will consider whether, in its view, the grade reflected an appropriate exercise of academic judgement. If the exam board judges that it did not, the exam board will determine the grade that the evidence would support. The exam board will also check that the centre had followed its own process.

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- An exam board will only revise a student's grade at appeal where the board finds the evidence on which the grade was determined cannot reasonably support that grade, rather than as a result of marginal differences of opinion.
- A student's grade could go up or down following an appeal.
- To reduce the number of errors made and, in turn the volume of appeals, centres will be expected to tell their students the evidence on which their grades will be based, before the grades are submitted to exam boards. This will allow issues associated with, for example, absence, illness or reasonable adjustments to be identified and resolved before grades are submitted.
- The date by which all appeals will have been considered will depend on the volume made, and the date by which the materials are submitted to the exam boards. As in a normal year, we expect the exam boards to prioritise appeals where the outcome will determine whether the student will be accepted onto a higher or further education course.
- Results days will be on 10 August for AS and A level, and 12 August for GCSE results.

AEA and Project qualifications

AEA and Project qualifications will be treated in the same way as GCSE, AS and A levels.

Private candidates

Private candidates will be assessed in a similar way to other students, by a recognised exam centre using a range of evidence. DfE is exploring ways to make sure there are affordable opportunities for private candidates to work with centres, and to encourage centres to work with private candidates.

Autumn exam series

Ofqual will consult on whether they should regulate for an autumn series to be held and open to all students who were expecting to take exams this summer.

Exams outside the UK

Ofqual will regulate to prevent exams taking place in the UK in summer 2021 but will not prevent them taking place elsewhere in the world, where it might be considered safe and fair for exams to go ahead (but neither will Ofqual require the exam boards to offer exams elsewhere).

Which students will be able to receive a result?

Any student who has been preparing to take a qualification, either in a school or college or as a private candidate, will be able to receive a grade so long as they are able to become registered

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with a centre which is able to determine a grade for them. The head of centre declaration will include confirmation that the centre has submitted grades only for those students who had been preparing to take the qualification, while making sure that this does not preclude any centre from taking on private candidates.

Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications

Information for centres

On the 25 February, the government announced the policy and scope of awarding vocational and technical qualifications in 2021. It was confirmed that:

- Alternative arrangements to written exams (similar to those being proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels) are needed for those VTQs and other general qualifications most like GCSEs, AS and A levels. Many of these were subject to calculated results last summer, and it is likely that some form of teacher assessment will be most appropriate.
- Assessments for on-demand qualifications, such as Functional Skills or ESOL Skills for Life, can go ahead if in line with PHE guidance. Where learners are unable to access FSQ assessments, an alternative method of awarding these qualifications is needed to ensure these learners can progress
- Where qualifications are used to demonstrate occupational or professional competency or proficiency or to gain a licence to practise are necessary, then these assessments for these qualifications should continue when this is possible, subject to PHE guidance.

The Vocational Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF)

Ofqual has put in place the Vocational Contingency Regulatory Framework (VCRF) for Awarding Organisations (AOs) offering VTQs. These regulatory arrangements will enable AOs to be sufficiently flexible to support as many learners as possible to complete qualifications, whilst still retaining the integrity of their qualifications.

For qualifications most important for progression to further study or employment, the framework enables AOs to:

- make awards when exams do not take place and/or not all internal assessments have been completed;
- determine the most appropriate approach to awarding based on their qualification design and delivery;
- determine what the minimum assessment evidence should be, so that valid and reliable qualifications are awarded; this should include consideration of completed assessments.

Ofqual also:

- expects them to develop consistent approaches across different AOs, and qualifications, as far as possible; and
- requires them to provide clear and timely guidance to teachers, on how grades will be

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awarded and what they need to do and be mindful of the burden they place on teachers.

Qualifications where teacher assessed grades won't play a part in awarding

- Occupational qualifications/ Qualifications used as a Licence to Practise/Professional qualifications - including Performing Arts Graded Examinations (PAGE).

Approach to assessment and awarding

Adaptations already introduced by the AOs can continue under the VCRF; further adaptations are permitted if they are necessary to address the ongoing impact of the pandemic.

Qualifications where teacher assessed grades will play a part in awarding

- VTQs/Other General qualifications, most like GCSEs, AS and A levels, which are important for progression to further/higher study or employment, such as: Applied General qualifications, Tech awards, Core maths
- VTQs that are important for progression to further/higher study or employment, but which include some assessment of occupational skills, such as: some Tech levels, other VRQs

Approach to assessment and awarding

For those VTQs most similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels, AOs are expected to take similar approaches to those used for those qualifications including the use of teacher judgement, appeals and measures for private candidates.

- VTQs that are important for progression to further study or employment, but which are not delivered in the same way as GQs and don't share all the same key characteristics, such as: Functional Skills Qualifications (FSQs) and ESOL Skills for Life.

Approach to assessment and awarding

Assessments may continue where viable but where learners can receive a result through a teacher assessed grade where they cannot access an assessment.

What to expect from your AOs

Your AOs will be working on providing more information as soon as they can about where you need to focus teaching and learning, and the timeline (what to do and when), so that learners can receive results.

What your AOs should be able to tell you quickly:

- Which qualifications will take similar approaches awarding to GCSEs, AS and A levels
- For which qualifications teacher assessed grades will play a part in awarding
- For which qualifications teacher assessed grades won't play a part in awarding
- The approach to awarding for FSQs – that exams and assessments will continue to be made available
- To carry on with teaching and learning to support engagement in education

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- The support that is available for centres now and going forward
- Where to find out information about your AOs' Covid response
- How your AOs are working with other AOs/stakeholders to develop consistent approaches.

What your AOs should also soon be able to let you know about:

- How centres should determine teacher assessed grades, including internal and external quality assurance; arrangements for results days; approach to private learners/candidates; deadlines to submit information; and any changes to adaptations.

FSQs, ESOL Skills for Life and other qualification taken 'on demand'

For qualifications that are taken on demand, such as Functional Skills and ESOL Skills for Life, there are three ways that learners will be able to access an assessment:

1. Assessments can continue to take place, in a college, training provider, school, employer premises, or alternative location, where it is safe for them to do so in line with public health guidance.
2. Assessments can be taken online in a wider range of venues, including at home.
3. Where neither of these options is possible, and learners need a result to progress, then a teacher assessed grade may be used.

If none of these options are possible, the assessment may be delayed or the learners moved to a different AO.

Resources

Ofqual is collecting data from all AOs about how results for each type of qualification will be awarded and will publish this information in the next few weeks in an interactive 'explainer tool,' that will be made available on:

<https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/AllQualifications/summer2020tool/>

This will be similar to the one that was made available over the summer and will help you find out quickly how results for relevant qualifications will be awarded this year.

Additional information

- [Decisions on how GCSE, AS and A level grades will be determined in summer 2021](#)
- [Decisions on Alternative arrangements for the award of VTQs and other general qualifications in 2021](#)

Department for Education:

- [Teacher assessed grades for students](#)
- [Direction issued to Ofqual](#)
- [Awarding qualifications in summer 2021](#)
- [\(COVID-19\): school and college performance measures](#)

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- [What you need to know about grades in 2021](#) (Blog)

Ofqual:

- [Response to the Secretary of State's direction of 23 February 2021](#)
- [How GCSEs, AS and A levels will be awarded in summer 2021](#) (infographic)
- [How vocational and technical qualifications will be awarded in 2021](#) (infographic)
- [How qualifications will be awarded in 2021](#)
- [Awarding of functional skills in 2021](#)
- [Consultation on the general qualifications alternative awarding framework](#)
- [Regulatory arrangements for the awarding of vocational and technical and other general qualifications in 2020-2021](#) (Live consultation)