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**Awarding in 2021 – Summer term key tasks and timelines**

*(Note: Information contained in this article was correct on the date it was written – 28 May 2021 - and could be subject to change.)*

As centres continue to navigate their way through this summer's arrangements, we consider the tasks which centres should have completed to date and those which will need to be completed in the coming weeks.

**Centre Policy**

Centres were required to submit their Centre Policy and Centre Policy Summary webform by 30 April. However, it is possible that some centres will/have been contacted by an awarding organisation to make amends to their policy. If this is the case, updated Centre Policies will need to be resubmitted as a priority.

**Vocational and Technical Qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications**

The VTQ landscape is complex. Unlike GCSEs and A levels (GQs), there is no single approach to awarding that works for all types of VTQs because of the very different qualification structures and assessment methods used. Therefore, Ofqual has divided VTQ and other general qualifications into three main categories:

- Qualifications that require a demonstration of occupational or professional competence or proficiency, or act as a licence to practise (e.g., construction, plumbing and electrical qualifications).

For these qualifications, assessments may continue as normal where possible, be adapted or rescheduled for a later date.

- Qualifications that are similar to, or delivered alongside, GCSEs, AS and A levels and which are used for progression to further or higher education (e.g., Applied Generals, Technical Awards and Tech Levels, other qualifications used in school and college performance measures, or Core Maths).

For these qualifications, awarding organisations are expected to use similar approaches to those used in the awarding of GCSEs, AS or A levels where possible and appropriate, using teacher-assessed grades.

- Other qualifications used for progression which are different from GCSEs, AS and A levels (e.g., Functional Skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life qualifications, Essential Digital Skills qualifications).

For these qualifications, awarding organisations are expected to make exams and internal assessments available to learners. However, if learners are not able to safely access exams and internal assessments, either in person in line with public health guidance, or remotely, then they may be able to receive a result through a different

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approach to awarding, including the use of teacher-assessed grades.

Centres should consult Ofqual's [qualifications explainer tool](#) for an overview of the approach being taken for specific qualifications to assess the impact upon students within their centre, and liaise with the relevant awarding organisation.

[BTEC qualifications - Awarding Results in 2021](#)

Pearson has confirmed that for BTEC qualifications that are in-scope of the alternative awarding process, they are requesting a holistic judgement, based on evidence from content taught, called a Qualification-level 'Teacher Assessed Grade' (Q-TAG) for learners completing these qualifications this year (certificating learners).

Centres should have reviewed the Q-TAG guidance for BTEC and ensured the Q-TAG centre policy has been understood and is being adhered to.

Recent timelines include the opening of the Q-TAG submission window on 26 May and, for those BTEC qualifications to which it applies, the Standards Verification (SV) activity completion deadline of 30 May 2021.

Friday 18 June is a key date, as this is when:

- Q-TAGs must be submitted to Pearson by in order for learners expecting to complete their BTEC qualification this summer to receive a final grade in August
- The Head of Centre Declaration must be submitted by
- Pearson begin post-submission Q-TAG checks (The timelines for the post-submission Q-TAG QA will be aligned with GQs and will run from 18 June through to 16 July. In exceptional circumstances this may run until 24 July 2021)

It should be noted that centres submitting Q-TAGs for BTEC qualifications categorised as 'B2' (those qualifications not similar to GQs) should not use the Q-TAG portal. The application process for Q-TAGs for B2 can be found [here](#).

BTEC qualification results will be issued to students on the equivalent GQ dates, 10 August (Level 3) and 12 August (Level 2). In terms of the appeals process for those BTEC qualifications permitted to have TAGs, Pearson will look to align this as far as possible (where appropriate) with the GQ appeals process.

[The arrangements for Cambridge Nationals and Technicals in 2020/21](#)

OCR has confirmed that students taking Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals will receive grades based on teacher judgements this summer. This is similar to the arrangements for GCSEs and A levels to ensure parity across the qualifications.

Recent and upcoming timelines include:

- 26 May to 18 June – Window for submitting teacher assessed grades and Head of Centre Declarations via OCR's grade submission system

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- (By) 25 June – OCR will tell centres if they have been selected to provide a sample of evidence
- (By) 28 June – OCR will confirm to those centres who will not be sampled for Nationals/Technicals
- 30 June – Deadline to upload evidence to OCR
- (By) 7 July – OCR will aim to contact centres to set up a follow up call OR to inform centres that OCR do not require any additional information from them
- 7 July to 16 July – Window for follow up calls to take place

Results will be issued to students on the equivalent GQ dates, 10 August (Cambridge Technicals) and 12 August (Cambridge Nationals). In terms of the appeals process, key dates and timelines fully align to the GQ appeals process.

### **Awarding body support materials**

Each awarding organisation has provided additional assessment materials for use in Summer 2021. These materials are not exams but can be used by centres to generate evidence to help determine a grade for each student.

Use of these materials is optional and the extent to which these materials are relied upon to inform decision-making may vary across centres. They were intended to provide evidence of knowledge or to validate a previous assessment.

In addition to existing assessment materials, the following additional materials were made available to centres:

- 31 March: Additional Assessment Materials (sets of questions, mark schemes and mapping)
- 12 April: Additional support materials (marking - exemplification)
- 19 April: Additional support materials (grading exemplification) and additional sets of questions made publicly available

These additional assessment materials (sets of questions, mark schemes and mapping grids) may be used in the form provided or tailored to better match the content that has been taught. They can be utilised at any point from 31 March until the date grades are submitted to awarding organisations.

These materials are not exams and they do not need to be completed under examination conditions, however, a student's normal access arrangements should be considered and implemented when work is set, especially if it is to be taken under timed, test conditions.

### **Private Candidates**

JCQ compiled a list of centres willing to offer GCSEs, AS or A levels to Private Candidates who wished to enter in Summer 2021. If a centre accepts Private Candidate entries, they must follow a similar assessment process as students who have studied with the centre.

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A centre will need to understand how the Private Candidate has been studying, what evidence they may have already generated, and how much of the specification content they have covered in their studies. This will enable relevant staff in the centre to identify what types of assessment might be most appropriate for the candidate, whether pre-existing evidence is available and whether any reasonable adjustments or access arrangements are required.

Private Candidates' results should be included in a centre's internal quality assurance checks as far as possible, but they may need to be excluded from wider quality assurance exercises where, for example, their evidence base is different from the centre's other students. Private Candidates should also be excluded from any check using the centre's historical data. Evidence to support Private Candidates' grades may be reviewed during external quality assurance, but they will be treated separately in statistical analysis used to identify centres for checks.

As Private Candidates will not affect a centre's published results or historical performance, it is important that centres indicate which students are Private Candidates when entering them for qualifications, unless the candidate is primarily an internal candidate taking one or more additional non-taught subject.

Appeals for Private Candidates will follow the same process as for other students.

**Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) – Determining grades and internal quality assurance**

Grades should be based on a holistic, objective judgement of the evidence of the students' performance on the subject content they have been taught. Grade descriptors and grading exemplification must be used to make holistic judgements about student performance.

As a guide, centres should follow these five steps when making grading decisions:

- Step 1: Consider what has been taught
- Step 2: Collect the evidence
- Step 3: Evaluate the quality of the evidence
- Step 4: Establish whether the proposed range of evidence is appropriate for all students
- Step 5: Assign a grade

Teachers' grading decisions will be subject to a school or college's overall quality assurance processes.

Awarding organisations require centres to have a clear approach for carrying out internal quality assurance of teacher-assessed grades before these are submitted.

Awarding organisations may wish to review centre policies and procedures as part of their quality assurance processes before the submission of teacher-assessed grades. Centres are expected to complete and return a 'head of centre declaration' when submitting teacher-assessed grades to confirm compliance with internal quality assurance arrangements.

A centre's quality assurance approach should include a check of grades against previous cohorts at the centre who took the assessment for the same qualification in previous years. This knowledge and the supporting data should be used to check that the grades submitted reflect

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the evidence that underpins them.

Teacher-assessed grades should be reviewed by other subject teachers and assessors as well as the relevant head of department or head of centre before submission. SENCOs may also take part in this review.

The final date for submitting grades is 18 June 2021. A declaration by the Head of Centre is also required to finalise the submission of grades.

Individual awarding organisations are providing details on how to input candidates' grades and the Head of Centre Declaration in their teacher assessed grade (TAG) collection system:

- AQA – [Centre Services](#)
- OCR – [Grade Submission System](#)
- Pearson – [Edexcel Online \(to access the TAG/Q-TAG Portal\)](#)
- WJEC Eduqas - [Portal](#)

Individual awarding organisations will also collect grade decisions for the endorsements in spoken language in GCSE English Language, speaking in GCSE Modern Foreign Languages and practicals in A level Biology, Chemistry, Geology and Physics at the same time as teacher assessed grades. Awarding organisations are confirming their individual arrangements to centres i.e. if endorsements should be submitted through their collection system used for TAGs or through their normal process (EDI/A2C or secure extranet site).

### **Submission of sample evidence**

Once the grades are received by awarding organisations, every centre will be asked to provide samples of student work. There are several reasons for this.

Awarding organisations will request evidence for at least 1 A level subject and 2 GCSE subjects, one of which is likely to be either English language or maths. Awarding organisations will do their best to make sure that a centre will only have to submit evidence to one organisation, but this may not be possible in every case. (Centres that offer only A levels or only GCSEs will be asked to submit only work for those qualifications.)

All centres will be asked to provide the evidence used to determine the grades for at least 5 students for each of these subjects. Awarding organisations will decide on the subjects and the students (selected from across the grade range, and potentially including private candidates where centres have accepted them).

Centres will be informed of the students and subjects which have been selected, with evidence collation and submission taking place between 21 and 23 June 2021. Centres will need to submit this evidence promptly – within 48 hours of the request being made – so centres must ensure that evidence and records are in good order ahead of that date.

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### External Quality Assurance

As part of the external quality assurance, awarding organisations will compare a centre's 2021 grade submissions with their results in previous years when exams took place – that is, 2017, 2018 and 2019.

Awarding organisations will prioritise quality assurance checks for those centres where results are more out of line with their historical results than other centres nationally, including where grades are lower.

### Review of evidence

The review stage will run from 21 June through to the 16 July 2021 (in exceptional circumstances, sample checks may take place until 23 July) and may involve the submission of additional student evidence and/or a virtual visit to resolve any concerns or queries. The vast majority of reviews will be carried out by one awarding organisation only, however, in some cases it may be necessary for centres to submit evidence to more than one awarding organisation; where this is necessary clear guidance will be given.

Sampling will also be carried out for vocational, technical and other qualifications once grades have been submitted. Awarding organisations will contact their respective centres to confirm arrangements. Centres should continue to gather and keep any evidence used to determine the grades in the relevant vocational, technical and other qualifications.

### Results day(s)

#### GCE AS and A level qualifications

- AS and A level results will be released to centres on Monday 9 August 2021
- AS and A level students will receive their results on Tuesday 10 August 2021

#### GCSE qualifications

- GCSE results will be released to centres on Wednesday 11 August 2021
- GCSE students will receive their results on Thursday 12 August 2021

Centres should ensure that contingency measures are in place in the event of the absence of their exams officer or IT issues on restricted release or results day(s).

Students should be informed of the process for collecting their results in good time ahead of their relevant results day.

### Post-results, Appeals and Complaints

For GCSE, AS and A level qualifications, there will be a two-stage appeals process:

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- Centre review – if a student does not consider they have been issued with the correct grade, they can submit a request to their centre to check if an administrative or procedural error has occurred. The centre will need to ensure the student is aware that their grade could go down, up or stay the same. If upheld, the centre will submit a request to the awarding organisation to correct the error and amend the grade.
- Appeal to the awarding organisation - if the student believes there is still an error following the centre review, or if the awarding organisation has made an administrative error, or the student considers that the grade awarded was an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement, the student must then submit a request to their centre to proceed with an appeal on their behalf. The centre will need to ensure the student is aware that their grade could go down, up or stay the same.

In both stages centres will need to ensure the student is aware that their grade could go down, up or stay the same.

If the student or centre considers that the awarding organisation has made a procedural error when handling the appeal, they can apply to Ofqual's Exam Procedures Review Services (EPRS) to review the process undertaken by the awarding organisation.

Where results for a vocational, technical or other general qualification has been awarded based on teacher-assessed grades, students should be able to appeal on the same basis as GCSE, AS and A level qualifications. However, the exact processes that need to be followed may be different across different awarding organisations. In most cases centres will conduct an initial review of the teacher-assessed grade ahead of any appeal being submitted to the awarding organisation. Awarding organisations will provide information to centres on the detail of the appeals approach that will apply for their qualifications where awards are based on teacher-assessed grades.

For qualifications not being awarded on the basis of a teacher-assessed grade where students took exams, for example Functional Skills qualifications, normal post-results services and associated key dates are likely to apply.

Key dates

- 16 August – Priority\* appeals deadline for students to request centre review
- 10 August to 7 September – Priority appeals window
- 23 August – Deadline for centres to submit priority appeals
- 3 September – Non-priority appeals deadline for students to request centre review
- 17 September – Deadline for centres to submit non-priority appeals

\*A priority appeal is where, for example a place at university is dependent on the appeal