

GUIDANCE

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

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

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Introduction

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

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

This information also applies to exam centres in Wales and Northern Ireland who deliver relevant Ofqual-regulated qualifications offered by AQA, OCR, Pearson, WJEC Eduqas, ASDAN and City & Guilds. For all other qualifications, centres should contact the relevant awarding organisation for further information.

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

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

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

The grades submitted to exam boards must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the student's performance across a range of evidence, on the curriculum content that they have been taught (or, for private candidates who undertook self-study, the content that they have studied). Heads of centre should

emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair – see separate [information about making objective judgements](#).

Centres should be careful to avoid teachers being put under pressure from students, parents or carers to submit grades that are higher than the evidence supports. Heads of centre should keep records of such cases and might be required to report to the exam boards any cases where they believe inappropriate pressure is being put on teachers. Exam boards may treat such cases as potential malpractice.

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

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

Standards in 2021

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

Exam boards will provide further advice and guidance to exemplify the standard of work expected for particular grades, including additional grade descriptors to supplement those previously published by Ofqual,¹ as well as exemplar materials. Centres should consider these when making their judgements.

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

In coming to this judgement, centres should seek to make it no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years. This is the same advice that was given to schools and colleges in summer 2020 – the expected performance standard for a grade has not changed. However, for 2021, centres should bear in mind that students might not have been taught all the content and so might not demonstrate such a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding.

As part of their overall quality assurance, centres should consider the grades for this year's cohort compared to cohorts from recent years when exams have taken place (2017, 2018 or 2019) at qualification level – for all GCSE subjects or all A level subjects combined. At qualification level, this historical data can provide a useful guide to the expected profile of results and enables centres to check that they have not been overly harsh or lenient in their assessment of the 2021 cohort compared to previous years in which exams took place. Where centres have taken on private candidates, they should be excluded from such comparisons.

Where the overall results at GCSE or A level look very different from recent years (2017, 2018 or 2019) centres should record the likely reasons for this, as exam boards might ask to see this if the centre is selected for external quality assurance. Exam boards will target their quality assurance based on a number of factors, including where a centre's results are considerably lower or higher than recent years.

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

Sources of evidence

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

Heads of centre will be required to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to provide the basis for a grade.

Evidence should relate to the specification content and should reflect, as far as possible, the sorts of questions and tasks that students would normally undertake in preparation for the qualification. Questions and tasks should be appropriately accessible for lower ability students and appropriately demanding to allow higher ability students to demonstrate performance to support higher grades. Questions and tasks should also be accessible for students with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND).

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

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

In coming to these holistic judgements, teachers will use their professional judgement to balance the full range of evidence available for each student against the performance standard set out in the grade descriptors and exemplification material, in line with the centre's internal quality assurance process.

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

Where student work completed before this guidance was published is no longer available, appropriate records should be included instead. For example, where mock exam scripts were returned to students for feedback, a copy of the mock exam paper

and the grade boundaries used should be included alongside a record of the mark a student achieved. Any work produced by students after this guidance was published on 24 March 2021 should be retained by the school or college if it is to be used as part of the evidence to support the grade.

Types of assessment evidence

We recommend the following types of evidence, where available:

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

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

When the evidence was produced

More recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance, although there may be exceptions, for example where a student has experienced significant ill health since the earlier assessments.

What students were asked to do

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

How the evidence was produced

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

Other considerations

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

Where a student is registered at 2 different centres, or has moved centre part-way through the course of study, relevant evidence from both centres could be considered. It is the responsibility of the centre making the exam entry to obtain any necessary evidence from other centres, including details of what was taught.

Where a student has worked with a specialist teacher or education professional², the centre should seek information from them as appropriate when considering the available evidence for a student and in coming to their grading judgement. This might include, for example, seeking information from qualified teachers of deaf or visually impaired learners, or teachers of EAL learners or virtual school teams working with looked after children studying at the centre. Centres with private candidates should also refer to the detailed guidance from the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ). While discussions with teachers and other professionals should take place before the teacher assessed grade is decided by the centre, those final judgements should be kept confidential within the centre.

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

Centres should bear in mind the following when making judgements.

1. Expected tier of entry in tiered GCSE subjects – teacher assessed grades must reflect the tier of entry (9 to 3 for higher tier; 5 to 1 for foundation, as well as U).
2. Authentic evidence from other centres or established educational providers where a student might have studied during the course or such evidence from where a student has studied with the support of a specialist teacher or tutor. Exam boards will provide further guidance to support centres in how they can

² This would not include a private tutor in cases where the subject has been taught at the centre.

determine whether evidence is likely to be authentic, including where they may normally rely on evidence that has been produced with certain types of provider without the need for detailed checks.

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

Reasonable adjustments for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place when evidence was generated. Where they were not, centres should take that into account when coming to their judgement. Where appropriate, this should include input from the SENCo, specialist teachers and other professionals. Centres will need to ensure that they meet their obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Centres should note that they are not permitted to charge students for putting in place reasonable adjustments.³

Since students are not taking exams this year, the usual special consideration arrangements will not apply. However, where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, centres should take that into account when making their judgements. The [JCQ guide to special consideration](#) outlines the sorts of personal circumstances that should be taken into account.

For GCSE English and GCSE modern foreign languages⁴ spoken language, and A level biology, chemistry, physics and geology practical work, exam boards will also collect grades for the separate endorsements. There will be no requirement to collect evidence for these assessments and these grades will not be subject to exam board quality assurance. Centres should submit these grades, alongside the qualification grades, by Friday 18 June 2021.

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

Private candidates

Private candidates should be assessed in a similar way to other students, using a range of evidence. This could include taking the exam board provided assessment

³ Charging for providing or arranging reasonable adjustments is unlawful under [Section 20 \(7\) of the Equality Act 2010](#). This means that where an adjustment or aid is necessary, and it is reasonable for the centre to make the adjustment or provide the aid, the centre must not charge the disabled person any additional fee in relation to that adjustment or aid.

⁴ This is an [exceptional arrangement for 2021 only](#).

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

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

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

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

Submitting data and evidence

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

Exam boards will contact centres in due course with further instructions about how to submit the data. Centres will be able to submit grades from 26 May, and the final deadline for submission of data, including grades for the endorsements, is Friday 18 June 2021. Centres will not need to send any supporting evidence, such as student work, when they submit grades to the exam boards, but centres should retain the work and the records of the marking and grading judgements. This may be subject to scrutiny during exam board quality assurance checks, and it will be required in cases where a student wishes to appeal their result.

Once the grades are received, every centre will be asked to provide samples of student work. There are several reasons for this. The deadline for centres to submit

grades is relatively late in the summer term, to maximise the time available for teaching. Exam boards therefore have very little time between submission and the end of term to request evidence. Collecting a sample of evidence from every centre means exam boards have evidence in case they need it, and reduces the need for them to contact centres after the end of term. It also provides reassurance that any centre's evidence will be available to review if necessary. The sample size is relatively modest, in recognition of the workload on centres, and the collection and submission of it should be able to be managed by exams office staff with minimal call on teachers or heads of centre.

Exam boards 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. Exam boards will do their best to make sure that a centre will only have to submit evidence to one board, 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. Exam boards will decide on the subjects and the students (selected from across the grade range, and potentially including private candidates where centres have accepted them) and they will let centres know which students and subjects have been selected in the week beginning 21 June. Centres will need to submit this evidence promptly – within 48 hours of the request being made – so it's important that centres' evidence and records are in good order ahead of that date.

As part of the external quality assurance, exam boards will compare a centre's 2021 grade submission with their results in previous years when exams took place – that is, 2017, 2018 and 2019. The comparisons that are made will include the cumulative percentage at each grade. We recognise that results for individual subjects, especially those with small cohorts, can vary from one year to the next so the comparison for a centre will be made at qualification level – for all GCSE subjects combined and all A level subjects combined – as well as by subject.

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

Internal sign-off within the centre

Department sign-off

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

Head of centre sign-off

The head of centre is required to confirm that the grades are a true representation of student performance. If the head of centre is unavailable to do this, it may be delegated to a deputy. The head of centre will be required to submit a declaration when the data is submitted, which will include the following points.

I confirm that:

- these grades have been checked for accuracy, reviewed by a second member of staff and are accurate and represent the professional judgements made by my staff
- entries were appropriate for each candidate in that students entered were those already studying the course, and each candidate has no more than one entry per subject
- my centre has met the requirements set out by exam boards/JCQ for internal quality assurance
- I am satisfied that each student's grade is based on an appropriately broad range of evidence, including evidence from other centres, providers or specialist teachers if relevant, and is their own work
- each student has been taught (or, in the case of private candidates, has studied) an appropriate amount of content to provide the basis for a grade
- exam board requirements have been met for any private candidates
- access arrangements and reasonable adjustments were provided with appropriate input from the SENCo and other specialists (and where they were not, that has been taken into account)

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- I and my staff have taken note of the Ofqual guidance on making objective judgements, judgements have not been influenced by pressure from students, parents or carers, and I am confident that the judgements are fair
- all relevant student evidence and records are available for inspection, as necessary



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Information Policy Team, The National Archives, Kew, London TW9 4DU

Published by:

ofqual

Earlsdon Park
53-55 Butts Road
Coventry
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344

public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk

www.gov.uk/ofqual