

GUIDANCE

Summer 2020 grades for GCSE, AS and A level, Extended Project Qualification and Advanced Extension Award in maths

Guidance for teachers, students, parents and carers

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Introduction

On 18 March 2020, the Secretary of State for Education announced¹ that the summer 2020 GCSE, AS and A level exam series would be cancelled in order to help fight the spread of the coronavirus (COVID-19) and that students due to sit the exams would be awarded a grade based on an assessment of the grade they would have been most likely to achieve had exams gone ahead. On 23 March, in a written statement to Parliament², the Secretary of State explained the government's intention that results would be issued to this year's cohort based on a range of evidence and data, including performance on mock exams and non-exam assessment.

School or college-based assessment already has an important role in many GCSEs, AS and A levels and in extraordinary circumstances such as these, schools and colleges are best placed to judge the likely performance of their students at the end of the course.

Ofqual and exam boards will do everything we can to make sure grades awarded this year are as fair as possible for students. This will include putting all centre assessment grades through an external standardisation process to better ensure that grades are comparable between schools and colleges. Between 15 and 29 April, we formally consulted on several aspects of the exceptional arrangements we have put in place for issuing grades in summer 2020. A [summary of the responses and the decisions are published separately](#) and we have updated our [information for Centres](#) document.

Any student who believes a grade they receive this summer does not reflect their ability will be able to sit an exam at the earliest possible opportunity in the autumn. Between 22 May and 8 June, we formally consulted on the details of the autumn exam series, and we have since published the outcomes of our [consultation](#).

Students who are studying GCSE, AS or A level courses, and who are due to take exams in 2021, will also have experienced disruption to their education this year. To ensure that exams and assessments in 2021 are as fair as possible in the circumstances, we are now formally [consulting](#) on proposed changes to the way some GCSEs, AS and A levels will be assessed in summer 2021.

This guidance aims to provide teachers, students, parents and carers with answers to some common questions about grades to be awarded in summer 2020 and how we propose to assess GCSE, AS and A level students in 2021.

Which qualifications are covered?

This information is relevant to all students and 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

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/schools-colleges-and-early-years-settings-to-close>

² <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2020-03-23/HLWS170/>

- Extended Project Qualifications (EPQ)
- Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) in maths

Does this process apply to vocational and technical qualifications too?

This process applies only to GCSE, AS and A levels, Extended Project Qualifications (EPQ) and Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) in maths. Many students will be taking other general and vocational or technical qualifications instead of or alongside GCSEs, AS and A levels. While this process does not apply to those qualifications, the same aims apply. Details of [our approach to awarding vocational, technical and other general qualifications](#) can be found on our website.

How it will work

How will centre assessment grades work?

We are asking schools and colleges to use their professional experience to make a fair and objective judgement of the grade they believe a student would have achieved had they sat their exams this year. It is important that schools and colleges take into account the full range of available evidence when they grade students - including non-exam assessment; the results of any homework assignments or mock exams; and any other records of student performance over the course of study. We are also asking schools and colleges to provide a rank order of students within each grade in a subject. This is because the statistical standardisation process will need more granular information than the grade alone.

We have provided clear guidance to schools and colleges on the grading and rank ordering process to help staff in different schools and colleges take a common approach to assessing their students.

Heads of Centre must sign a declaration confirming the centre assessment grades and rank order are a true representation of their students' performance, before checking the data for accuracy, and submitting it to the exam board.

When and how will centre assessment grades be submitted to exam boards?

Exam boards have provided detailed instructions to schools and colleges on how to submit centre assessment grades and rank orders. They asked schools and colleges to submit the information between Monday 1 June and Friday 12 June 2020.

Should schools and colleges be setting students new work to inform the grade they submit?

There is no requirement to set additional mock exams or homework tasks for the purposes of determining a centre assessment grade, and no student should be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete any work set after schools were closed. Where additional work has been completed after schools and colleges were

closed on 20 March, Heads of Centre should exercise caution where that evidence suggests a change in performance. In many cases this is likely to reflect the circumstances and context in which the work is done.

What does this mean for non-exam assessment?

In some subjects students will have completed, or nearly completed, non-exam assessment. This will be helpful to schools and colleges in deciding each student's grade and rank order. Where there are several subject teachers within a school or college, this work might also be helpful in standardising teachers' approach to determining the rank order and awarding grades. Schools and colleges do not need to ask students to complete any unfinished non-exam assessment work for the purposes of grading and marks for completed NEA should not be sent to the exam boards.

Where NEA has been completed, students should not be given their marks. However, schools and colleges should retain students' NEA work.

Do schools and colleges need to submit the evidence they have used for grading?

No, schools and colleges do not need to submit any supporting evidence, such as student work, to exam boards, but they should retain records of this in case exam boards have any queries about the data. The Head of Centre will need to sign a declaration to confirm that the centre assessment grades and the rank order of students are a true representation of student performance, having reviewed the processes and data used to generate these grades and rank order.

How can schools and colleges rank order their students accurately?

Teachers are highly experienced at making assessment decisions and evidence shows they can rank order their students with a high degree of accuracy. Many will already be familiar with ranking students where they do this in subjects with non-exam assessment. Schools and colleges can draw on the experience of these teachers this summer.

When rank ordering students in a subject it is vital that schools and colleges base their decisions on the full range of available evidence. We realise there are some circumstances in which rank ordering is more challenging – such as in large colleges or in schools where students are very similar in terms of performance. In large schools and colleges, subject teachers within a department should discuss the rank order and come to a shared view of the standard being applied. There are a number of ways in which this can be done, including for example, for each teacher to grade and rank order their students; discuss and compare the abilities of students at the top and bottom of the rank order within each grade to ensure that a consistent standard is being applied; adjust the grades accordingly; and then integrate the rank orders by discussing students at the top of the rank order and working down using examples of student work. Exam boards have been discussing with centres that have particularly large cohorts how the rank ordering might be managed. Schools

and colleges should contact their exam board for advice if rank ordering is proving challenging.

In alternative provision settings (such as pupil referral units), centres may have less evidence of student performance over the course. These centres should draw on all available evidence they do have and speak to their exam board if they do not believe they have seen sufficient evidence of the student's achievement to make an objective judgement of their performance.

How should rank ordering work when schools and colleges have students in different year groups taking a qualification?

All students registered with a centre who were due to sit an exam in summer 2020 should be included in one rank order for that subject. This includes resit students.

How will this work for tiered subjects?

In the case of tiered GCSE subjects, schools and colleges should only provide centre assessment grades which reflect the tier of entry of the individual student (9 to 3 for higher tier; 5 to 1 for foundation tier).

The rank order for each grade (for example 4-4 for combined science) should include students entered for both tiers, so that there is a single rank order for the subject.

How does this work for schools and colleges who teach more than one specification?

Where a centre uses more than one specification for a subject, they should go through the process of ranking all students within each grade, for the whole cohort. They should then submit the rank order according to the guidance that will be produced by each exam board. Exam boards will be in touch with those centres who are affected by this.

Should French and German teachers take into account the grading adjustment proposed by Ofqual when making their grading decisions?

The adjustment in GCSE MFL is intended to align grading standards in French and German more closely with GCSE Spanish. As this adjustment is purely statistical, it will be made at a national level by the exam boards with guidance from Ofqual. Therefore, schools and colleges should not try to take account of this adjustment when making judgements about centre assessment grades for students this summer, but should work on the basis that the standard is the same as 2019. The adjustment will be factored into the statistical standardisation exercise and reflected in students' final results.

Can NQTs undertake this grading work?

Newly qualified teachers should be supported by their head of department or subject lead to undertake their grading of students.

Can schools and colleges consider evidence from specialist teachers or other professionals when making grading and rank ordering decisions?

A centre should, if applicable, seek further information from teachers and other education professionals who have been supporting a student's learning to allow them to make secure judgements about centre assessment grades and a student's position in the rank order. This might include, for example, seeking information from teachers in another school, college, or alternative provision such as a hospital setting. It could also include peripatetic or advisory teachers who may work across a number of centres, such as EAL teachers or qualified teachers of deaf, vision impaired and multi-sensory impaired children and young people. Centres might also contact the virtual school team(s) that work with looked after children studying at the centre.

What if a student has transferred from one school or college to another?

If a student has transferred from one school or college to another part-way through their studies, the current Head of Centre may wish to consult with the previous centre about evidence they hold and may take this into account in reaching a judgement where they are confident to do so.

Where a student has studied previously with a school or college but has not entered for examinations with that centre, it may be more appropriate for the previous centre to submit to the exam board the centre assessment grade and rank order information. This will be in cases where the previous school or college holds more evidence of the student's likely achievement had exams gone ahead, and so is better placed to take responsibility for submitting a centre assessment grade and rank order for the student. The exam boards will allow the entry to be transferred from one centre to another in these cases, where both centres agree the approach.

What should schools and colleges do in the case of late entries?

It is important that results this summer are issued only to students who genuinely intended to take exams this summer, and were prevented from doing so by the government's decision that no exams would take place. Exam boards will issue results only to those students who were entered for exams this year before the JCQ entries deadline of 21 February.

We will, however, allow exam boards to exercise discretion where a compelling case can be made that a student would have been entered before the later 'late entries'

deadline set by JCQ, including where centres withdrew entries in respect of students who they did not believe would be eligible to receive a calculated grade.

Standardisation and accuracy

Will centre assessment grades be accurate?

School and college-based assessment already has an important role in many GCSEs, AS and A levels. In an unprecedented situation such as this, schools and colleges are best placed to judge the likely performance of their students had courses been completed as normal.

There is evidence to show that teachers can rank order students with a high degree of accuracy. In the interests of fairness to students, judgements made by schools and colleges across the country should be consistent. Exam boards will therefore standardise the judgements once grades have been submitted.

How will centre assessment grades be standardised?

To make sure that grades are fair between schools and colleges, exam boards will put all centre assessment grades through a process of standardisation using a model developed with Ofqual.

The standardisation model will draw on the following sources of evidence: historical outcomes for each centre; the prior attainment (Key Stage 2 or GCSE) of this year's students and those in previous years within each centre; and the expected national grade distribution for the subject given the prior attainment of the national entry. For AS/A levels, the standardisation will consider historical data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. For GCSEs, it will consider data from 2018 and 2019, except where there is only a single year of data from the reformed specifications.

Standardisation will not change the rank order of students within each school or college; nor will it assume that the distribution of grades in each subject/centre should be the same. However, if grading judgements in a subject in some schools and colleges appear to be more severe or generous than others, exam boards will adjust the grades of some or all of those students upwards or downwards accordingly. This means that the centre assessment grades submitted by schools and colleges and the final grade that students receive could be different. It also means that adjustments to centre assessment grades might be different in different subjects.

As with other years, the statistical model will consider prior attainment at school or college level, not at individual student level. As such, students' individual performance will not be predetermined by their prior attainment at KS2 or GCSE.

We consulted on the aims and principles of the standardisation model as part of our wider consultation on exceptional arrangements for issuing grades in summer 2020. Overall, we found there was broad support for our approach to standardising centre assessment grades and we have now confirmed the principles of the model.

Will the standardisation model take into account different types of centre?

We are exploring the finer detail of the standardisation model to give students the fairest results possible. We will complete testing of the predictive accuracy of the standardisation model before we come to a final decision on the circumstances under which we will place significantly more weight on the statistical evidence than on the centre assessment grades. For small centres (which will include many Pupil Referral Units and Special Schools) and subjects with a small entry the balance will be different than for large centres and subjects. It is important that the standardisation model is sensitive to the reliability in statistical predictions for small centres.

The model will only place more weight on a centre's historical performance than the submitted centre assessment grades where we believe that it will increase the likelihood of students getting the grades that they would most likely have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020.

In alternative provision settings (such as pupil referral units), centres may have less evidence of student performance over the course. These centres should draw on all available evidence they do have and speak to their exam board if they do not believe they have seen sufficient evidence of the student's achievement to make an objective judgement of their performance.

Will the standardisation process take into account recent improvement in school performance?

Ofqual's data³ shows that for the vast majority of schools and colleges any year-on-year variation in results for a given subject is quite small. In 2015 and 2016, 90% of centres were classed as having stable outcomes and 8.5% of centres were classed as having 'unstable results'. Only 0.8% of centres had results that increased by more than the national average change in both 2015 and 2016 and only 0.5% of centres had results that decreased more than the national average change in both 2015 and 2016.

While we recognise that it would be desirable to reflect centre trajectory in the issued calculated grades, we remain of the view that the lack of stability over a 3-year period in improvements or deteriorations in performance for the overwhelming majority of centres means that any statistical model is likely to be unacceptably unreliable in predicting trends in performance in 2020.

For this reason the trajectory of schools and college results will not be taken into account in the standardisation model. We have formally consulted on this and received overall support for this approach.

Will students see the centre assessment grades their school or college submits?

It is important schools and colleges do not share provisional grades, nor rank orders, with students or parents and carers. This is to protect the integrity of the process through which teachers' judgements are arrived at, and to avoid teachers, subject

leads, heads of department or Heads of Centre feeling under pressure to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence. Any inappropriate disclosure of centre assessment grades and rank order information will be investigated by exam boards as potential malpractice. In the event centres receive requests for personal information used to award grades this year prior to the announcement of results, the Information Commissioner's Office has confirmed that the exemption under Schedule 2, paragraph 25 of the Data Protection Act 2018 will apply to centre assessment grades - more information on this exemption and what this means can be found on its website at:

<https://ico.org.uk/global/data-protection-and-coronavirus-information-hub/exam-script-exemption/>

Once centre assessment grades have been submitted to exam boards, the process to produce the final grades will start. More information will be given to teachers, students, parents and carers at the time final results are issued.

Can centres share or discuss a student's centre assessment grade with other centres or within their multi-academy trust?

The provision against sharing centre assessment grades, rank order information, and the professional judgements which underpin them does not apply to centres sharing data within their multi-academy trusts or local education authority, or to discussions between teachers at different centres where necessary to determine a centre assessment grade for a student who has studied at more than one centre (for instance, students in alternative provision, or private candidates transferring to another centre). Head of Centre authorisation would still be required to share this information.

This information should be exchanged directly between centre staff, and on no account should the centre assessment grade be shared with the student or their parent or carer as part of this process.

Results and progression

When will results be released?

Results will be released on the published results days as originally planned. These are 13 August for A level and 20 August for GCSE.

Will grades issued in 2020 have the same currency as grades issued in previous or future years?

The grades awarded to students will have the same currency as grades awarded in other years and should be treated in this way by universities, colleges and employers. On the results slips and certificates, grades will be reported in the same way as in previous years.

Will students be able to progress to the next stage of education or employment with these grades?

Yes, this approach will enable students to move onto the next stage of their education or employment in the autumn as planned. We have consulted widely and most of those responding to the consultation were supportive of this approach.

Can students appeal these grades?

Students will be able to appeal their grades – through their school or college – if they believe the process this summer was not followed correctly in their case. In line with the direction given to us by the Secretary of State for Education, a centre may appeal to the exam board if it believes the centre itself made an error when submitting a centre assessment grade or rank order information or if it believes an exam board made a mistake when calculating, assigning or communicating a grade. We expect that any mistakes will be quickly found and corrected.

We will produce information for students that sets out how their grades were calculated this year and the options available if they believe their result was not properly produced, including access to appeal. The [National Careers Service Exam Results Helpline](#) offers advice each year for students who have not received the results they had hoped for. We will also make a helpline available to students and their parents or carers to talk about the appeals process and any other questions they may have about their results this summer.

Can students appeal against their original centre assessment grades (or rank orders)?

When consulting on this summer's arrangements, we considered carefully opportunities for a student to challenge their centre assessment grades and position in their centre's rank order. On balance, we decided it would not be in the interests of students or the fairness of the arrangements overall. Any appeal would have to be undertaken by someone better placed than the student's teachers to judge their likely grade if exams had taken place – in the unique circumstances of this summer, we do not believe there is any such person. In addition, because of the role of the rank order in grading this year, such an appeal would have implications for other students in the cohort: if one student successfully appealed against their position in the rank order, it would have negative implications for other students who would, in turn, need to be given an opportunity to appeal.

If students or others have concerns about bias, discrimination or any other factor that suggests that a centre did not behave with care or integrity when determining the centre assessment grade and/or rank order information they should normally raise these concerns with their centre, in the first instance; or they could take their concerns to the relevant exam board if this was the more appropriate route. Where there is evidence, we require exam boards to investigate such allegations as potential malpractice or maladministration. Such allegations would be very serious, and we expect them to be rare, but this is an important safeguard for students and their overall confidence in this year's grading arrangements.

Students who feel that their grades from the summer do not reflect their ability will have the opportunity to take their exams in the autumn series or in summer 2021. If they choose to do this, students will be able to use the higher of the two grades for future progression.

Can centres appeal the operation of the standardisation model?

Centres will be able to appeal against the operation of the standardisation model where the wrong data was used to calculate results for learners, or where there was an administrative error in the issuing of results by an exam board.

In some rare cases, centres might be able to evidence that there has been a substantive change in the cohort at their centre which undermines the assumption that historical outcomes based on previous cohorts are sufficiently representative of the 2020 cohort to reliably inform the statistical standardisation model. This would amount to using the wrong data for the purposes of standardisation. In these cases, centres can appeal to exam board(s) to seek to have the error corrected. Our analysis indicates such cases would be exceptional, however, because the size of change that would be required to affect calculation of results would need to be great.

Will there be a cost for appeals?

Fees for all aspects of the exam process are set by the exam boards. They will share further information on any fees for appeals in due course.

Information for different groups of students

How will this affect private candidates (including home educated students)?

We have consulted on arrangements for private candidates this summer. We received broad support for our proposal to only allow exam boards to issue results for private candidates for whom the Head of Centre is confident their staff have seen sufficient evidence of the student's achievement to submit a centre assessment grade and include them in the centre's rank order. We have now confirmed this approach.

Both we and the exam boards have published further guidance about the alternative sources of evidence a school or college might consider where it does not have sufficient evidence about a student's attainment to submit a centre assessment grade and rank order information. Heads of Centre have been asked to tell any private candidates registered at the centre whether they will provide them with a centre assessment grade and include them in their centre's rank order.

What about private candidates whose exam centre is unable to provide them with a centre assessment grade?

The guidance also allows for private candidates to transfer to another centre, ahead of the grading process this summer, if the school or college where they had registered decides it cannot submit a centre assessment grade for them. In such cases, some other centres, such as those with experience of working with distance learners, have been working with some of those private candidates who need a grade this summer in order to progress. So that the grading process is fair, and to maintain the validity of the qualification, the Head of Centre must have the same level of confidence in the grade and rank order position as for all other students.

The exam boards expected centres who were willing and approved to work with private candidates in this way to use any capacity to prioritise candidates who need to receive a grade to progress this summer. However, as the deadline for centres to submit centre assessment grades has now passed, those private candidates who did not have a centre provide a centre assessment grade for them will not receive a grade this summer. We appreciate that this will be very disappointing for those candidates. These candidates will have the opportunity to take their exams in the autumn or next summer.

Given the particular challenges facing private candidates this summer, we have asked organisations that represent higher and further education providers to consider the steps that providers could take when making admissions decisions this summer for any private candidates who do not receive a grade. They have told us that they believe that institutions will consider a range of other evidence and information for these students to allow them to progress wherever possible.

How will this affect students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)?

We asked schools and colleges to use their professional experience to make a fair and objective judgement of the grade they believe a student would have achieved had teaching and learning continued as normal and they were able to sit their exams. For students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), schools and colleges made their judgement assuming students had continued to receive any usual additional learning support. Where students had an agreed reasonable adjustment for their exams, schools and colleges were asked to take account of the likely achievement of this student with these in place.

As with all students, where additional work was completed after schools and colleges were closed on 20 March, we asked Heads of Centre to exercise caution where that evidence suggests substantially better or worse achievement than before 20 March. For some students with SEND, this may reflect issues accessing remote learning and the learning support they would normally receive. We suggested schools and colleges should approach other educational professionals who have worked closely with students with SEND to seek if they are able to provide further information to consider in coming to the centre assessment grade. This might have included, but

was not limited to, qualified teachers of deaf, vision impaired and multi-sensory impaired children and young people.

What about students who have an agreed reasonable adjustment or access arrangement?

Schools and colleges judged the grade that these students would most likely have achieved if they had been able to sit their examinations with the intended reasonable adjustment or access arrangement in place.

Will special consideration apply this year?

Special consideration requests are considered in the event that a student is unable to take an assessment or suffers a traumatic event that might affect their performance. These will not apply this summer because students will not be taking their exams. Instead we asked centres to make judgements which reflected how the students would have performed under ordinary circumstances. Where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, centres were able to bear that in mind when making their judgements.

Might this approach be biased against students with certain characteristics?

Our overriding priority is to ensure that this year's grading is as fair as possible, given the exceptional circumstances, so that students can progress to the next stage of their education or training.

We believe the process of calculated grades we have set out is fairest in the circumstances. Nonetheless, we recognise, and take seriously, concerns about the potential for students to be disadvantaged by the approach being taken this summer. We have considered these carefully when developing the arrangements, alongside the published literature, the views of interested groups with whom we have engaged during this process and the many consultation responses we received.

To mitigate the risk of bias, centres have been asked to use their professional experience to make an evidence-based, objective, holistic judgement of the grade they believe a student would have achieved had they been able to take exams this year. In light of concerns raised, we have published further guidance to help centres make these judgements. This guidance has been informed by assessment research and the insight of relevant stakeholders.

We have also built in further safeguards to the standardisation model, carefully testing a range of possible standardisation models to ensure that we selected the one which most accurately predicts student grades while ensuring that this is not at the expense of any students who share certain protected characteristics. The model we have selected is the fairest possible in the circumstances and will ensure, so far as possible, that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged on the basis of their socio-economic background or particular protected characteristics.

Students who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance will also have the opportunity to sit an exam in the autumn.

How will these affect early entrants?

Students in year 10 and below who had been entered to complete exams in GCSEs, AS and A levels this summer will be issued with results on the same basis as students in year 11 and above.

How will this affect students who have English as an additional language (EAL)?

Schools and colleges used their professional experience to make a fair and objective judgement of the grade they believe a student would have achieved had teaching and learning continued as normal and had they sat their exams. For students with English as an additional language (EAL), schools and colleges were asked to consider the likely language acquisition a student would have made by the time of the exam, and any increased ability to demonstrate subject content knowledge, as part of this and reflect this in their judgement. They could seek further information from specialist EAL teachers as part of this.

How about students who have improved significantly since their mock exams?

We know that all students work differently. Some perform best in NEA or mock exams; others perform at their best in final exams. This is why it is so important that schools and colleges make holistic judgements about the grades they believe their students would have most likely achieved had they been able to complete their assessments. We asked them to use their professional expertise to draw on the full range of available evidence rather than solely assigning grades based on performance in a mock exam, for example.

Autumn exams

Who will be eligible to take exams in the autumn?

Entry to autumn exams will be open to all students who had entered for GCSEs, AS and A levels in the summer series or to those who the exam board believes have made a compelling case about their intention to have entered the summer series. Students who would normally be entitled to take GCSEs in English language and maths in November should also be able to take exams in those subjects. Between 22 May and 8 June, we formally consulted on the details of the autumn exam series. We took account of the responses to our consultation when finalising our approach and have now published our [decisions](#).

When will the autumn exam series be held?

Given the ongoing disruption caused by the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, we cannot yet say when the exams will take place. However, we are aiming for, AS and A level exams to take place in October and GCSE exams in November. We will therefore put in place provision for the exam boards to offer exams from October

2020 with the exact timing being confirmed by us, having taken advice from government, the exam boards and groups representing school and college leaders and teachers.

We understand the logistical challenges schools and colleges will face in the autumn and we will continue to talk to the sector about this. The Department for Education is exploring ways to minimise additional burdens on centres. Centres that usually enter particularly large numbers of students for GCSE English language and maths in the autumn are likely to face particular challenges in accommodating students in exam conditions this year. We have therefore decided to permit exam boards to run a further series in January for GCSE English language and maths only – if there is demand for this. This would allow centres, if they wished, to split their entry between November and January. This would also allow for more teaching time to prepare students for their exams.

The exam boards will set the entry deadlines for students wanting to take exams in the autumn. We would expect these would not be before the end of August in order to allow students to understand if their calculated grades support their progression to the next stage of their learning or into employment and to receive support or advice on their next steps.

Which centres will enter students in autumn exams?

Where a student wishes to sit an exam in the autumn, the Department for Education have confirmed in their [guidance](#) that the centre responsible for entering the student in the 2020 summer series should enter the student in the autumn series and take overall responsibility for ensuring that they have somewhere appropriate to sit their exams.

Will students be able to sit all of their exams in the autumn?

Yes. To ensure this is fair for all students, we will require exam boards to offer the full suite of GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in the autumn. This means any student who does not feel their calculated grade reflects their ability is given the opportunity to sit an exam at the earliest reasonable opportunity.

If students are unhappy with a grade do they have to take all their exams in the autumn or can they just take exams in the subject they are unhappy with?

Students will not have to sit exams in all subjects in the autumn. They may take exams in as few subjects as they would like to. If a student wishes to take exams in a particular subject in the autumn, they will need to take all the exam papers in that subject.

Will the format of exam papers in the autumn series be any different to usual?

No. We believe it is important that students take a style of exam paper which is familiar to them and allows them to demonstrate the full range of their knowledge. The format of exam papers in the autumn series will, therefore, be the same as those usually offered in the summer. We have formally consulted on these proposals and received support for this approach.

To what extent will non-exam assessment be taken into account in the autumn series?

While it would be desirable for the autumn series to include NEA, in the current circumstances, we believe that the fairest option is for qualifications taken in the autumn to be based on students' exam performance only. The exception to this is in art and design, where exam boards will set a new task that students would need to complete under supervised conditions.

This is because some students will have completed non-exam assessment before schools and colleges closed on 20 March, but others will not have done so. As students will be at different stages in their non-exam assessments, and because many will no longer be studying in the centres in which they started their assessments in the autumn, we do not believe it would be fair (even if it were manageable) for students to complete the non-exam assessments they had started.

We have published [research](#) about the impact of coursework on different groups of students, such as those of different ethnicities and gender to check that the removal of non-exam assessment will not have a disproportionate impact on students that share certain characteristics. This concludes that variation in GCSE and A level grade outcomes is largely explained by students' prior attainment, and finds little evidence that coursework in the subjects researched has any impact on outcomes for different groups of students, including those with special educational needs

What about exam fees this year? Will there be a cost for students taking exams in the autumn?

Fees for exams are set by the exam boards. They will share further information on fees for awarding grades this summer, and for the optional autumn exam series in due course. Fees are payable by centres for students enrolled in school or college. External/private candidates pay their own fees and should enquire with the relevant board about these.

Will students choosing to take an exam this autumn still be able to go to university this year?

Students may still choose to take an exam even where their university or college place has been confirmed. However, it will take time for the results of these exams to be issued, so they will need to discuss with their higher or further education institution whether to start their course as planned or to delay their entry.

We have asked organisations that represent higher and further education providers to consider how they might be flexible in admissions decisions, considering delays to entry to courses, for any students choosing to take an exam this autumn. We are reassured to hear that they believe that institutions will be flexible wherever possible, but we recognise this might only be possible in a minority of cases.

When will the results of the autumn exams series be released?

In usual circumstances we do not specify when results must be issued and this year we believe that results days for the autumn series should also be set by exam boards, in consultation with other stakeholders. We have spoken to the exam boards who believe that results for A level exams taken during October could be published before Christmas and results for GCSE exams taken in November could be published in February. The results for GCSE English and maths could be published in January, as usual. This is dependent on the final dates of the autumn exam series, however.

If students take an exam this autumn, which will stand – the exam or centre assessment grade?

Students who feel that their grades from the summer do not reflect their ability will have the opportunity to take their exams in the autumn series or in summer 2021. If they choose to do this, students will be able to use the higher of the 2 grades for future progression.

Will students be able to appeal the results of the autumn exam series?

The autumn series will replicate a normal summer exam series as far as is possible. The normal review of marking and appeal arrangements will therefore apply to the autumn series.

Assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021

How will students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels be assessed in 2021?

We recognise students expecting to take exams next year, and their teachers, parents and carers are understandably concerned about the disruption to their education caused by the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The Department for Education has already introduced a number of measures to help reduce the impact of continued school and college closures. Our focus is on exams and assessments – and ensuring they are as fair as possible and support the well-being of students.

In line with government policy, we are planning for exams and assessments to be taken next year. However, given the lost education students will have experienced during the spring and summer terms of 2019/2020, we are proposing a package of measures that together will help to mitigate the disruption to most students' education. Amongst other things, these include changing the assessment requirements for some subjects to free up teaching time and, in some instances, reduce what needs to be taught.

We are now consulting on our proposals and welcome anyone with an interest to respond. This [consultation](#) will be open for 2 weeks starting on 2 July and ending on 16 July 2020.

What changes to GCSEs, AS and A level assessments are you planning for 2021?

We are proposing changes to exams and assessments which we believe will protect the validity of the qualifications whilst freeing up more teaching time, and, in limited cases, reduce what needs to be taught. We have also considered changes that might be needed to assessments if public health protection measures are in place. The nature of these changes will depend on the qualification and subject in question – there is no one size fits all approach.

The detailed proposals for each subject are set out in our consultation. Examples of adaptations designed to free up teaching time include: removing the requirement to record the spoken language assessment in GCSE English language; allowing GCSE students to observe (rather than undertake) practical science work; and allowing mock-up or detailed plans to be marked instead of completed design and technology prototypes. In a small number of qualifications, we also propose reducing the content which is sampled in assessments.

We detail the full set of proposed changes in our [consultation](#), subject by subject, and invite views on our proposals.

Will the subject content of exams and assessments be reduced?

The content for each qualification is determined by the government and it is government policy that the content of qualifications should not change in 2021. This is because schools and colleges teach the elements of their chosen courses in the order that best suits them, and so any change to content may not benefit all centres. However, in his letter to us, the Secretary of State asked us to look at options for content sampling in question papers to reduce what is assessed (and therefore needs to be taught). We have discussed with the Department for Education which subjects they would like us to focus on for this purpose. They have confirmed that they do not want us to make changes to the way content is sampled for the core subjects of GCSE English language, English literature, maths and the sciences, or in any A level qualifications.

In many GCSE subjects, we have proposed changes which will free up teaching time without changing the way subject content is sampled. In GCSE history, ancient history and geography, however, we believe reducing what is assessed may be the

most appropriate way to support students who have lost learning time. We propose that for each GCSE history and ancient history specification we should introduce a choice of topics on which students would be required to answer questions in their exams, with one topic remaining mandatory. In GCSE geography, we propose that the content relating to fieldwork should not be assessed in 2021.

We believe that, in the circumstances, this is the fairest way to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 for students taking these qualifications in summer 2021 and that the proposed changes will not unduly affect students' successful progression to A level.

Will the number and format of the exams change?

We have carefully considered a range of options for the format of exams next year, including reducing the number of exams or requiring exam boards to re-design exam papers so that students have a greater choice of questions to answer. We believe that changing the number and format of exams introduces significant risks into the assessment process, most notably a risk to fairness. In the case of optional questions, for example, research suggests that students who are weaker in a subject are less likely to choose the question they are best able to answer. Other studies have shown differences in the scores of equally able students who select different optional questions in an exam paper. This could disadvantage some students. [We explore this research in detail in our consultation.](#)

Changes to the number or length of exams could be unsettling to students and would carry an increased risk of errors. Although reducing the number of exams could make the exam timetable shorter and more manageable (thus freeing up more teaching time), it would also increase the risks that students would miss all of their exams in the summer if they experienced an adverse effect like illness or bereavement. This risk would be heightened if COVID-19 is still in circulation.

We therefore propose that the exams taken in 2021 should be of the same number and length in each subject and in a familiar format as in previous years. We do not believe they should include more optional questions than usual, except in the specific case of GCSEs in history and ancient history where students would know in advance which units would be optional.

When will the 2021 summer exam series be held?

We have asked the exam boards to consider how the 2021 exam timetable could be changed to allow more time for teaching - in particular, whether GCSE exams could start after half term, on 7 June 2021. We are also seeking views on whether such a change would be appropriate for the A level exam timetable, and the impact of any delay in issuing results.

How can assessments operate next year if public health safeguards remain in place?

We do not yet know the extent to which public health safeguards such as social distancing will remain necessary next academic year. However, some subject requirements, particularly those that require group activities, could be more difficult for students to undertake and teachers to supervise if public health safeguards continue. We have identified subjects which could be particularly affected if public

health safeguards were needed in the next academic year and suggested how these might be addressed. This includes changes to performance rules in A level dance and drama. The full list of proposed adaptations is set out in our [consultation](#).

How will you ensure standards in 2021 are maintained with previous and future years?

The Secretary of State for Education has asked us to advise him in the coming months how we might ensure students' outcomes are protected through our approach to grading next year, as we did to protect the interests of students who took the reformed qualifications for the first time. Our approach – using statistical predictions to guide the first awards of reformed qualifications – worked well to protect the interests of students taking the reformed qualifications and we will consider its use next year. We will provide further information in due course.

Are there contingency plans in case of continued disruption from the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic?

Our proposals for the assessment of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021 assume that it will be possible for exams and assessments to take place next year. We are separately developing contingency arrangements should this not be possible, either on a national or a local basis. Our proposals also assume that, in line with the Secretary of State's steer to us, while there might be some on-going disruption, students will be able to continue with their education in the next academic year to an extent that they will largely cover the subject content.



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Published by:



Earlsdon Park
53-55 Butts Road
Coventry
CV1 3BH

0300 303 3344
public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk
www.gov.uk/ofqual