

GUIDANCE

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

Information for Heads of Centre, Heads of Department and teachers on the submission of Centre assessment grades

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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
- AS and A levels
- Extended Project Qualifications (EPQ)
- Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) in maths

This information also applies to exam centres in Wales and Northern Ireland who offer Ofqual-regulated qualifications¹ offered by AQA, OCR, Pearson, WJEC Eduqas, ASDAN and City & Guilds. Information on other Ofqual-regulated qualifications, including vocational and technical qualifications, will be provided separately.

This information is provided in the context of the most up-to-date advice for educational settings provided by the Department for Education (DfE) and Public Health England.² If that advice changes, Heads of Centre should consider this information in the light of any updated guidance.

On 18 March 2020, the Secretary of State announced³ that the summer 2020 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 Parliament, ⁴ 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. Since then, we have been working with exam boards to enable the award of grades for GCSE, AS, A level, EPQ and AEA this summer, to facilitate progression of students to sixth form, college, higher education, training, apprenticeships or employment.

Exam boards will ask exam centres to generate, for each subject, **centre assessment grades** (see page 5) for their students, and then to **rank order** the

¹ GCSEs graded 9 to 1, standalone AS, linear A levels, and legacy A level re-sits. CCEA Regulation will issue guidance for centres in Northern Ireland taking CCEA qualifications.

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19/guidance-to-educational-settings-about-covid-19>

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/schools-colleges-and-early-years-settings-to-close>

⁴ <https://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Lords/2020-03-23/HLWS170/>

students within each of those grades. Given the current challenging circumstances, Ofqual and the DfE believe that providing these two key pieces of information will enable exam boards to issue the fairest possible results. As far as was practical in the current circumstances, we have consulted with teachers and education leaders across the sector as we developed this approach.

Exam boards are working to adapt their IT systems to collect these grades and the rank order in a way that is as straightforward as possible for Heads of Centre and their staff. Exam boards will provide detailed instructions about how and when to submit the data as soon as possible. However, we recognise that Heads of Centre need some certainty so that they can plan this work with their teams, so we confirm that the deadline for submitting data to exam boards will be **no earlier than 29 May** and that centres will have a window of at least two weeks in which to submit the data.

This document provides further information for Heads of Centre, heads of department and teachers about how to generate these grades and the evidence that should be considered.

The centre assessment grades submitted to exam boards must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of **the most likely grade a student would have achieved if they had sat their exams this summer and completed any non-exam assessment**. Heads of Centre should emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair.

In the interests of fairness to students, judgements made by centres across the country should be consistent. However, it is not feasible in the current circumstances for exam boards to standardise the judgements of all teachers across all subject areas before grades are submitted. So that the final grades awarded are as fair as possible, exam boards will standardise the judgements across different centres once they have been submitted, using a statistical methodology developed in conjunction with Ofqual.

DfE have confirmed that they will not hold schools/colleges to account on the basis of exams and assessment data from summer 2020, and that the data should not be used by others, such as Ofsted, local authorities, academy trusts, etc to hold schools/colleges or teachers to account. DfE will not be publishing, or sharing, institution-level school/college accountability measures, such as Progress 8 and Level 3 Value Added, using the summer 2020 data.

We propose that exam boards should **not** issue grades to year 10 students (or lower year groups) as their progression will not be hindered if they do not receive a grade in summer 2020. We will consult on this proposal very shortly, and a final decision will be made before any data will need to be submitted.

Information you need to provide

For every GCSE, AS and A level subject, exam boards will require each school, college or other exam centre to submit the following information:

- a **centre assessment grade** for each student – the judgement submitted to the exam board by the Head of Centre about the grade that each student is most likely to have achieved if they had sat their exams. This professional judgement is derived from evidence held within the centre and which has been reviewed by subject teachers and relevant heads of department
- the **rank order** of students within each grade – for example, for all those students with a grade of 5 in GCSE maths, or a grade B in A level biology, a rank order where 1 is the most secure/highest attaining student, and so on

This will also apply to the Advanced Extension Award (AEA) in maths and the Extended Project Qualification (EPQ).

For GCSE English language spoken language and A level biology, chemistry, physics and geology practical work, exam boards will also collect the grades for the separate endorsements. If they have been completed, the grades should be submitted. If not, then centre assessment grades for the endorsement, as described in this document, should be generated and submitted. Exam boards will contact centres with further instructions about how to submit this data.

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

Centre assessment grades

This should be a holistic professional judgement, balancing the different sources of evidence. Teachers and heads of department will have a good understanding of their students' performance and how they compare to other students within the department/subject this year, and in previous years. We want heads of department and teachers to consider each student's performance over the course of study and make a realistic judgement of the grade each student would have been most likely to get if they had taken their exam(s) in a subject and completed any non-exam assessment this summer. This could include U (ungraded).

In coming to this holistic judgement, centres should assume that it is no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year, compared to previous years.

For GCSE combined science, the centre assessment grade should use the 17-point grade scale from 9-9 to 1-1.

Teachers should draw on existing records and available evidence (as far as possible in the context of current public health advice). It is important that the judgements are objective, and they should only take account of evidence about student performance. This will include the following, where it is available.

- records of each student's performance over the course of study, including for example progress review data, classwork, bookwork, and/or participation in performances in subjects such as music, drama and PE
- performance on any non-exam assessment (NEA), even if this has not been fully completed. **You should not ask students to complete their NEA work and you do not need to submit marks for any completed NEA.** But you will need to bear in mind that many students achieve a higher grade on their NEA than in their exams, so you should not base your judgment on NEA alone. You should balance it with your judgement about their likely performance in the written paper(s), where appropriate. In case students decide that they want to enter in a subsequent exam series, you should retain any NEA work completed to date
- for re-sitting students, any information about previous grades achieved or NEA marks that would, under normal circumstances, have been carried forward
- for A level students who took AS in 2019, their AS results in that subject
- performance on any class or homework assessments and mock exams taken over the course of study
- tier of entry in tiered subjects – centre assessment grades must reflect the tier of entry (9 to 3 for higher tier; 5 to 1 for foundation, as well as U)
- previous results in your centre in this subject – these will vary according to a number of factors, including prior attainment of the students, but our data⁵ shows that for most centres any year-on-year variation in results for a given subject is normally quite small
- the performance of this year's students compared to those in previous years
- any other relevant information

Where disabled students have an agreed reasonable adjustment (for example a reader or scribe), or other students have an agreed access arrangement, the judgement should take account of likely achievement with the reasonable adjustment/access arrangement in place. Special consideration requests, in the

⁵ See for example <https://analytics.ofqual.gov.uk/apps/GCSE/CentreVariability/>

event that a student is unable to take an assessment or suffers a traumatic event that might affect their performance, will not apply this summer. Instead judgements should reflect how the students would have performed under ordinary circumstances. Where illness or other personal circumstances might have affected performance in mock exams, centres should bear that in mind when making their judgements.

Given the timing of the announcement, we recognise that centres will have incomplete evidence, and that the range and amount of evidence will vary between different subjects. Judgements should be made on the evidence that is available.

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.

There will be **no requirement** to send any supporting evidence, such as student work, to the exam boards, but centres should retain records of this, in case exam boards have any queries about the data.

Please note that these **centre assessment grades** are **not** the same as:

- age related grades (usually defined as the grade a student would receive if they took the GCSE, AS or A level now)
- working at grades (the grade a student is currently working at)
- target grades (often set a little higher than likely to be achieved, to motivate students)
- predicted grades provided to UCAS in support of university applications

A rank order of students within each grade, for each subject

The statistical standardisation process will require a more granular scale than grades alone. For this reason, we need centres to provide a rank order of students within each grade. For example, if you have 15 students for GCSE maths for whom you have given a centre assessment grade of 5, you should then rank them from 1 to 15, where 1 is the most secure/highest attaining, 2 is the next most secure and so on.

How to make sure the rank order of students is as accurate as possible

Once centre assessment grades have been submitted, exam boards will carry out a process, being developed with Ofqual, to statistically standardise the grades between different centres. For this to be as fair as possible, it is important that the rank order of students is as accurate as possible.

Where there is more than one subject teacher, they will need to agree one rank order for all students within the centre who are taking that subject. To do this, teachers within a subject department will need to discuss the rank order and come to a shared view of the standard being applied within their centre. We recognise that this will be challenging for some centres and in some subjects, and in the current circumstances. However, the rank order is important for the statistical standardisation process.

In doing this, teachers should draw on examples of student work, including non-exam assessment where available. If two or more students are almost indistinguishable in terms of their subject performance (and are therefore judged likely to get the same grade) then it may be very difficult to put them into a rank order. However, exam boards will need a single rank order for all students. Tied ranks (that is, giving two students position 1) will not be allowed and will mean the submission is rejected by the exam board and returned to the centre for amendment. This could mean that results are delayed.

Where a centre has a large entry for a subject, with many different teachers, we recognise that this will be challenging. There are a number of ways in which this could be done, including for example, for each teacher initially to grade and rank order their students; discuss and compare the qualities 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 individual students beginning at the top of the rank order and working down.

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, and then submit the rank order according to the guidance produced by each exam board.

Statistical standardisation

Exam boards, using a model developed with Ofqual, will use a statistical model to standardise grades across centres in each subject. We are working with technical experts within exam boards and others to develop this model, which will combine a range of evidence including:

- expected grade distributions at national level
- results in previous years at individual centre level
- the prior attainment profile of students at centre level

This statistical standardisation process will not change the rank order of students within your centre. Nor will it assume that the distribution of grades in each subject and/or each centre should be the same. If, when compared to the evidence above, your judgements are more generous than would be expected, then the final grades for some or all of your students will be adjusted down. On the other hand, if it appears that your judgements are more severe, then the final grades for some or all of your students will be adjusted up. We will do this to align the judgements across centres, so that, as far as possible, your students are not unfairly advantaged or disadvantaged this summer. This means that the centre assessment grades you submit and the final grade that students receive could be different.

Included students

Where centres have accepted entries from private candidates (students who they have not taught themselves, because they have been home-schooled, are following distance-learning programmes or studying independently) those students should be included where the Head of Centre is confident that they and their staff have seen sufficient evidence of the student's achievement to make an objective judgement. We are urgently exploring whether there are alternative options for those students who do not have an existing relationship with a centre and who need results this summer for progression purposes. Unfortunately, this is unlikely to be possible for all private candidates, some of whom may instead need to take exams in the autumn to get their grades. We appreciate that this is a matter of real concern to private candidates and will provide an update as soon as possible.

Centres should submit centre assessment grades for all students for whom they are confident that they can make a judgement. This will be a decision for the Head of Centre. The Head of Centre should communicate their decision to any private candidates and take advice from their exam board where cases are not straightforward. It will be important for centres to make sure that their entries are complete and accurate as grades will only be issued for those students who have been entered.

Grades should be submitted for all students in year 11 and above (including those taking A levels in year 12). We propose that grades will **not** be issued for students in year 10 or below, and that centres should withdraw any entries for them, but we will shortly consult on this proposal. We realise that, if the final decision is to exclude year 10 and below students, this will be disappointing for those students, but our objective in awarding grades based on teachers' judgements is primarily to allow

students to progress to the next stage of their education, or to employment or training. Students in year 10 and below will have the opportunity to sit exams in future exam series. We will make a final decision and provide further information before any data needs to be submitted to the exam boards.

How and when to submit this information to your exam board

Exam boards are currently working to adapt their IT systems to collect this data in a way that is as straightforward as possible for centres. The final deadline for submission of data to exam boards will be specified by the exam boards. It will not be earlier than 29 May 2020 and that centres will have a window of at least two weeks in which to submit the data.

Further information will follow from exam boards after Easter. While you can begin the work to generate the grade and rank order, please **do not** try to submit data until exam boards have issued instructions.

Sharing data with students, parents and carers

Students, parents and carers will want to know that the process of generating centre assessment grades is rigorous, objective and fair. [We have published a message for students and parents/carers that Heads of Centre may wish to circulate.](#)

Data subjects (students) are able to request their personal data under Article 15 of the General Data Protection Regulation. However, in respect of personal data such as marks or other information processed by a Data Controller for the purposes of determining results, an exemption from disclosure exists under paragraph 25(2) of the Data Protection Act. This allows Data Controllers (in this case centres) to delay disclosure of such information until after results have been issued.

Centres **must not**, under any circumstances, share the centre assessment grades nor the rank order of students with students, or their parents/carers or any other individuals outside the centre, before final results have been issued. This is to protect the integrity of teachers' judgements, and to avoid teachers, heads of department, senior leaders or Heads of Centre being put under pressure by students and parents, to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence. Since the final grades for some or all students in a centre could be different from those submitted, it also helps to manage students' expectations.

Once centre assessment grades have been submitted to exam boards, the process to produce the final grades will start. More information will be made available to centres, students, parents and carers at the time final results are issued, to facilitate any appeals against the process.

Arrangements for appeals

Under the circumstances, the normal arrangements for reviews of marking and appeals will not apply. We are considering what arrangements might be put in place to allow an effective appeal and will consult on proposals shortly. Centres should expect the possible grounds of appeals to be relatively narrow and based on application of the process. In submitting data to exam boards, centres should make sure that it is correct.

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, both grades will stand.

Internal sign-off within the school/college

Department sign-off

Each set of centre assessment grades for a subject must be signed off by at least two teachers in that subject, one of whom should be the head of department (or where if there is only one teacher or only one is available, by the Head of Centre). 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 will be required to confirm that the centre assessment grades and the rank order of students are a true representation of student performance. If the Head of Centre is unavailable to do this, it may be delegated to a Deputy. In reviewing these centre assessment grades, the Head of Centre should consider how the distribution of centre assessment grades compares with grades achieved by the centre in previous years.

The Head of Centre will be required to submit the following declaration when the data is submitted.

I confirm that these centre assessment grades, and the rank order of students are accurate and represent the professional judgements made by my staff, and that entries were appropriate for each candidate. Having reviewed the relevant processes and data, I am confident that they honestly and fairly represent the grades that these students would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat their exams as planned, and that they have not been disclosed to either the candidate or their parent/guardian. I understand that exam boards will conduct a statistical standardisation exercise, using a model developed with Ofqual, and that, if the profile of grades submitted is

substantially different from what might be expected based on my centre's historic results and the prior attainment of this year's students, the grades for my centre will be adjusted to bring them into line with national standards.

Exam boards may investigate any attempts to undermine this system which might be regarded as malpractice.

Next steps

Heads of Centre should now make arrangements to do the following:

1. Check entries are complete and correct.
2. Contact any private candidates to confirm whether the centre will be able to submit a centre assessment grade and include them in the rank order.
3. Consider what evidence will be available to teachers and heads of department.
4. Begin the work to generate a centre assessment grade and an overall rank order in each subject, but **not** try to submit the data yet.
5. Make sure that any grades and/or rank order are not shared with students, parents or carers.

Exam boards will provide detailed information after Easter about how to submit the data.

Ofqual will consult on a number of changes to our regulations that allow this year's results to be delivered in the changed circumstances, including:

- the principles underpinning the technical model for the statistical standardisation process
- arrangements for private candidates and students in year 10 and below
- arrangements for appeals
- an equalities impact assessment

Further advice and information

If you need further information, please take a look at our [guidance for teachers, students, parents and carers](#) or contact your exam board.

Exam board contact details

Exam board	Phone	Email
AQA	0800 197 7162	eos@aqa.org.uk
ASDAN	0117 941 1126	info@asdan.org.uk
City & Guilds	0300 303 5352 (option 2, option 3)	technical.quality@cityandguilds.com
OCR	01223 553998	general.qualifications@ocr.org.uk
Pearson	0344 463 2535 (exams officers) 0345 618 0440 (parents and students)	support.pearson.com/uk/s/qualification-contactus
WJEC Eduqas	029 2026 5000	info@wjec.co.uk

Please do not contact exam boards at this time to ask about the specifics of submitting data. They will provide further information and instructions as soon as possible.



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