

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.

This guidance aims to provide teachers, students, parents and carers with answers to some common questions about grades to be awarded in summer 2020.

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
- AS and A levels
- 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. We are working urgently to develop an approach and we will provide further information as soon as possible.

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/>

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. 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.

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

Exam boards will provide detailed instructions to schools and colleges on when and how to submit centre assessment grades after Easter. The deadline will not be earlier than 29 May 2020 and centres will have a window of at least two weeks in which to submit the data. In the meantime, we are advising schools and colleges on the next steps they need to take to give them the maximum possible time to prepare.

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.

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 confirm that the centre assessment grades and the rank order of students are a true representation of student performance.

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).

Can NQTs undertake this grading work?

Newly qualified teachers should be supported by their Head of Department to undertake their grading of students.

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 being developed with Ofqual. We will consult on the principles of this model shortly, but we expect it will look at evidence such as the expected national outcomes for this year's students; the prior attainment of students at each school and college; and the results of the school or college in recent years. Standardisation will not change the rank order of students within each centre; nor will it assume that the distribution of grades in each subject/centre should be the same. However, if grading judgements 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.

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.

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

No. It is important schools and colleges do not share provisional grades, nor rank orders, with students or parents and carers before final results have been issued. This is to protect the integrity of the teachers' judgements, and to avoid teachers, Heads of Department or Heads of Centre feeling under pressure to submit a grade that is not supported by the evidence.

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.

Results and progression

When will results be released?

We're working hard to get results out as soon as is possible. Results won't be delayed after the dates they were expected in August and ideally will be issued a little earlier, so students can have the certainty they need.

Will grades issued in 2020 carry the same weight as grades issued in previous or future years?

The grades awarded to students will have equal status to the 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. The Department for Education has discussed the plan with UCAS, school and college leaders, who are supportive of the approach.

Can students appeal these grades?

We are all focused on making sure students are not disadvantaged by these unprecedented circumstances including to allow for an appeal where appropriate. 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. 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.

How will this affect private candidates and home educated students?

We know that private candidates are anxious to know how these arrangements apply to them. Where centres have accepted entries from private candidates (students who they have not taught themselves, because they have been home-schooled, 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 but unfortunately this is unlikely to be possible for all external 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. 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 these affect early entrants?

We propose that exam boards will not issue grades for students in year 10 or below (unless students have been officially moved up a school year), 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 school and college 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.

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

Schools and colleges will judge 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.

Autumn exams

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

We are developing the details of the autumn exam series and we will share more information as soon as possible.

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 and 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.

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, both grades will stand.



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