

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

**ofqual**

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## Introduction

On 18 March 2020, the Secretary of State for Education announced<sup>1</sup> 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 Parliament<sup>2</sup>, 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 the detail of our approach and we will provide further information as soon as possible.

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

<sup>2</sup> <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 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 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. We are exploring with exam boards how more support can be given to centres where rank ordering may be more challenging.

## 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).

## 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 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 developed with Ofqual. We are currently consulting on the aims and principles of the standardisation model.

We propose 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.

Under our current proposals 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 the standardisation model take into account different types of centre?

We are still exploring the finer detail of the standardisation model to give students the fairest results possible. At the moment, we believe the type of centre is unlikely to be a part of this model. However, we are aware that year-on-year variation in student results is greater in small centres (including alternative provision). Any model we use will take this greater variation into account.

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?

It is possible to develop a standardisation model which takes into account trends of improvement or deterioration in school or college outcomes over previous years. In this case, the statistical model would predict higher grades for those schools and colleges on an upward trajectory and lower grades for those on a downwards trajectory. In other words, an assumption would be made that the trend in results which has occurred over recent years will continue.

Ofqual's data<sup>3</sup> shows that for the vast majority of schools and colleges any year-on-year variation in results for a given subject is quite small, however. 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. The fact that so few centres show a consistent trajectory means that any statistical model may be unreliable in predicting trends in performance in 2020. It would seem unfair to use these predictions to forecast that a centre whose grades had been decreasing year-on-year would experience another year of decline, when this may not have happened.

For this reason we propose that the trajectory of schools and college results not be taken into account in the standardisation model. We are consulting on this proposal.

## 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. This is to protect the integrity of the teachers' judgements, and to avoid teachers, Heads of Department or Heads of

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[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/746952/6432\\_designed.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/746952/6432_designed.pdf)

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?

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 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 and that they can be confident in the grades they receive. We will, however, build in an appeal opportunity as an extra safeguard.

The Secretary of State for Education, in his direction to us, said there should be provision for appeals on the grounds of a mistake in the way the grade was calculated for a particular student or students. We are consulting on how this should work. We have proposed that, as in most cases any other year, appeals should be made to exam boards by schools and colleges, on behalf of one or more of their students where the school or college believes the wrong information was used to generate calculated grades, or that a mistake was made when the exam board standardised the grades or communicated the grades to centres.

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.

## 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 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.

Exam boards are urgently exploring whether it might be possible for some centres, such as those with particular experience of working with distance learners, to work with those private candidates who need a grade this summer in order to progress. The centre might be able to submit centre assessment grades and a rank order for those candidates, even though there is no existing relationship between the centre and the candidate. We do not yet know whether this will be possible, or how many students might be able to receive a grade in this way. The exam boards will continue to work with us to explore all options for how such a process could work and will provide an update on this no later than 30th April. In the meantime, private candidates should seek information about their options from the centre where they were due to take their exams in the first instance, and then from their exam board.

It may, however, be necessary for some students who have not been studying with a school or college to take exams in the additional autumn series or next 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)?

Schools and colleges should 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 should make their judgement assuming students had continued to receive any usual additional learning support. Where students have an agreed reasonable

adjustment for their exams, schools and colleges should also take account of the likely achievement of this student with these in place.

As with all students, 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 substantially better or worse achievement than before 20 March. For some students with a special educational need, this may reflect issues accessing remote learning and the learning support they would normally receive.

## 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.

## Might this approach be biased against students with certain characteristics?

Our overriding priority is to ensure that all students are fairly rewarded for their hard work. We have developed clear guidance for schools and colleges which sets out how schools and colleges should make objective, evidence-based judgements of student performance. We are confident that schools and colleges will be able to use this fairly.

We are nonetheless alert to the risk of some level of unconscious bias in centre assessment grades. We have carried out an equality impact assessment, which we have published as part of our consultation. This is informed by a review of the research literature on bias in teacher assessments. The research findings are mixed and suggest that the effects of bias vary depending on the context in which judgements are made. However, the evidence suggests it will not be greater than any bias which might occur in other forms of assessment (for example when teachers mark non-exam assessments).

We believe that in the circumstances, centre assessment grades are the most reliable way of ensuring students get the grade they need to progress this year. Even so, our standardisation model is designed to provide further safeguards in this area and, so far as is possible, help ensure that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged by this approach. 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?

We initially proposed that students in year 10 and below who had planned to take exams this summer would not receive a calculated grade. Our rationale for this was that they did not need grades this summer for their immediate progression and could gain the qualification by taking exams in future series. We committed to consulting on this issue.

We have since received representations from centres, parents and others indicating that the progression of some Year 10 students would be disrupted if they were not awarded a grade this summer, and to exclude them would have an unfair impact. We

have taken these views into account and are now proposing that early entrants should receive a calculated grade this summer. We are now seeking views on this proposal as part of our consultation.

## What about Year 10 and 12 students who have had their teaching and learning significantly disrupted this year?

We know the COVID-19 outbreak will have caused stress and uncertainty for many students, regardless of whether or not they were due to take exams this year. Students who are studying GCSE, AS or A level courses, but are not due to take exams until 2021, will also have experienced disruption to their teaching and learning this year. It is too soon to say what level of impact this will have on their performance in exams in 2021, but if the evidence suggests that the performance of next year's GCSE, AS and A level students is lower than expected, we will work with exam boards to ensure they are not unfairly disadvantaged by these circumstances. Our immediate priority is to ensure this year's GCSE, AS and A level results are as fair and robust as they can be. We will develop our approach to future exam series over the coming months.

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

Schools and colleges should 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 had they sat their exams. For students with English as an additional language (EAL), schools and colleges should consider the likely language acquisition a student would have made by the time of the exam as part of this and reflect this in their judgement.

## 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 will ask 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

### 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.

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

### 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.

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

Our aim is for results to be awarded before Christmas. We are working with exam boards to work out how this can be delivered.

## **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 two grades for future progression.



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