

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. We have now consulted on the exceptional arrangements we plan to put in place for issuing grades in summer 2020. We will take account of the responses to our consultation when finalising our approach and will provide an update on the outcome as soon as we are able to.

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,

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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/>

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. 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 in the coming weeks. The start date for entering Centre Assessment Grades will be from the 1st June. Exam boards will notify schools and colleges of the final deadline for submission, but they will have a window of at least two weeks in which to submit the data.

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

## **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.

## 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.

## 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/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.

## What about 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. Under our proposals, 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.

We recently consulted on our proposals for late entries as part of our wider consultation on arrangements for issuing grades in summer 2020. We will take account of the responses to our consultation when finalising our approach.

## 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 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 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 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.

We have 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. We will take account of the responses to our consultation when finalising our approach.

## 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 have consulted on this proposal and will take account of the responses to our consultation when finalising our approach.

## **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 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.

## **Can centres share 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.

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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)

## 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 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. We consulted on this proposal and will take account of the responses to our consultation when finalising our approach to appeals.

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. 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 they can submit a centre assessment grade and include them in the centre's rank order. We have now confirmed this approach. We said in our consultation decision document that we could not identify any reliable way to calculate grades for private candidates who could not be included within a centre's cohort of students. No workable possibilities were advanced by respondents to the consultation and we have decided that private candidates can be included only through centres.

On 30 April, exam boards published new guidance, and [we published an update to our Information document](#), 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. The Head of Centre should 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. These centres, who may have experience of working with distance learners, may be able to work with some private candidates who need a grade this summer in order to progress. So that the grading process is fair to all, the Head of Centre must have the same level of confidence in the grade and rank order position as for all other students.

Students who have not already been in touch with the centre with which they were planning to take their exams should contact the centre to ask when a decision on whether the centre will provide a centre assessment grade for them will be made. Private candidates interested in working with a new centre should contact their exam board for information on centres approved to do so.

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 SEND, this may reflect issues accessing remote learning and the learning support they would normally receive. 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 include, but is not limited to, qualified teachers of deaf or visually impaired children.

## 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 this year's grading is as fair as possible, so that students can progress to the next stage of their education or training. 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 do recognise there are concerns about the potential for students to be disadvantaged by this approach. We have been and will be engaging further with organisations and groups that have raised concerns about this issue, and will consider the responses to our consultation on this matter when finalising our approach. When we launched our consultation, we published an equality impact assessment, informed by a review of 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 on the basis of their socio-economic background or because they have a particular protected characteristic. 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 subsequently 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. For example, we were told that curriculum choices made by some schools and colleges meant that students in year 10 or below who might have been planning to take exams for a qualification this summer would not be allowed by their centres to continue to study for the qualification or to take the exam at a later date. We also heard concerns about the potential impact of excluding early entrants on students with SEND, who might wish to spread their GCSE exams over different years to make them more manageable.

We took these views into account, and proposed in our consultation that early entrants should receive a calculated grade this summer. There was broad support for this proposal. We have therefore made the decision that students in year 10 and below who had been entered to complete exams in GCSEs, AS and A levels this summer should be issued with results on the same basis as students in year 11 and above.

## 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. We do not yet know for how long this disruption will continue.

We are working with the DfE, the wider sector and exam boards to consider the options for next year.

## 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, and any increased ability to demonstrate subject content knowledge, as part of this and reflect this in their judgement. They may 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 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 now developing the details of the autumn exam series. We will shortly consult on details of the exam series – we hope anyone with views about how the series might run, will respond to our further consultation.

### 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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