



Further guidance for students, parents and carers on grading of GCSEs, A-levels and BTEC qualifications in summer 2021

Dear students, parents and carers

We wrote to you three weeks ago, explaining in outline Ofqual's decisions on how qualification grades will be determined in summer 2021. As promised, we are now writing with further details of our intended plans, hopefully answering some of the many questions we are sure you have about the process. However, if you do have any further questions after reading this booklet, please email jcbrignell@thomastallis.org.uk

How will grades be awarded this summer?

Grades for GCSEs, A levels, and most other qualifications including BTECs will be based on a process involving teacher assessment against national standards, internal quality assurance, and external quality assurance by the exam boards.

The national process defined by the Department for Education and the exams' regulator, Ofqual is as follows:

1. Teachers will **assess students against a national standard**, which will be defined by the exam boards before the Easter break.
2. Departments will submit grades which will be **quality assured by the school / college**. This internal quality assurance process will have to be signed off by the exam board to ensure it is rigorous and in line with national standards.
3. Our school or college results will be **quality assured externally** by the exam boards, which may include random sampling of our school or college's evidence.
4. If the exam boards are confident in our submitted results, **then the exam boards will award students their final grades**.
5. If students do not think their results are accurate, they will have the right to **appeal**.

So, do teachers award the grade?

Simply: no. The grade students achieve will start with their teacher's assessment of their performance across a range of evidence. This is against a nationally-defined standard, not the teacher's own opinion, and all grades will be moderated and standardised. This assessment is then subject to both internal and external quality assurance before the final grade is awarded by the exam body as usual.

Does this mean grades are decided by an algorithm?

No, unlike last year, students' grades will not be changed by a formula. The internal and external quality assurance measures will all be done by humans, not an algorithm. There is no limit on the achievement of students, providing they have evidence that they are working at that grade.

What about loss of learning / impact of Covid?

This year, teachers will only assess students on content they have been taught – because of the continued disruption of the pandemic. This means students will not be disadvantaged if they individually, their whole class or whole year group have been unable to complete their full course. However, grades can only be submitted on the basis of the evidence we have of students' performance, even if that evidence covers less of the course than usual. Students who would usually have extra time in the exams will benefit from the same arrangements in teacher assessment.

Will grades be different between different schools and colleges?

No, the standard against which teachers will be assessing students is set nationally by the exam boards. This is the standard that will be used during external quality assurance and appeals to ensure consistency and fairness across the system.

What evidence will be used?

Teachers are able to draw on a range of assessment evidence from across a student's study of the course. This may include homework tasks, mock exams, and papers set by the exam boards. This may include evidence from before the second lockdown, as well as evidence from March – May. The exam boards are producing assessment materials that will be sent to us before Easter. Different departments may use different sources of evidence, and there is no requirement for any one type of assessment to be used – it's about a performance across a range of evidence.

So that we can ensure our judgements are as accurate as possible, we have made the following decisions:

- The scheduled year 11 and 13 mock exams have been cancelled and replaced with a final assessment period for each year group, to take place between Easter and May half-term.
- Subject areas will decide on the most appropriate assessments that will take place in this period.
- Teachers will refer to these and a broad range of other evidence available from across the course in order to generate a holistic final grade.
- There will then be a final quality assurance process before grades are submitted before 18 June.

You will find a timetable for these final assessments with this booklet.

Why have we decided on this approach?

We have agreed on this approach in order to provide students with an assessment experience which is as close as possible to what they have been preparing for throughout their studies. We have set this out clearly, via an assessment timetable, so that students and parents know and understand what they will be assessed on and when this will happen. Lessons between now and then will focus on preparing students for how they can achieve their very best.

We have decided that where appropriate, these final assessments will take place in exam venues with external invigilators, as the rules and regulations protect from interference, disruption and malpractice. They also enable us to organise appropriate access arrangements and any additional dispensation to which some candidates are entitled. We think that the experience will also be useful practice for students who may be required to sit exams again in their future.

However, we are mindful of the pressure students are under and want to emphasise to them that these assessments will not carry the same high stakes as terminal exams would have done. They will form part of a broader set of evidence about students' understanding and

performance gathered throughout their courses, and will not hold students back if other evidence is available.

The final assessment period is earlier than final exams would have been – why is this?

We must submit our final grades to the Exam Boards on Friday 18 June. Setting papers, marking papers, moderating papers, coming to a balanced decision about each student drawing on all the evidence that we have about them, checking the results generated with curriculum leaders, then with the senior leaders who manage each department, then signing off on the final grades as balanced and fair is not a quick process, nor should it be: it must be taken seriously.

Working back from the 18 June, to fit in the right amount of fair assessment and checking procedures for each of the many subjects that we offer, we must begin setting assessments for students on the 26 April and finish them on the 14 May. This is at most seven and at a minimum four school weeks before the final marks must be submitted. It is worth noting that the Exam Boards allow themselves between eight and ten weeks to complete these processes, and it is their only responsibility.

If students have less time to revise, will you be assessing them on reduced content?

Simply, yes. We are aware of the hugely compressed revision time available to students this year - less than half the usual amount. We have therefore decided to remove between a third and half of the expected content over the final assessment period.

In order to make the final assessment period fair for all students and across all subjects, your child's teachers will also create revised topic checklists to guide student revision of these areas within this short timeframe.

What if a student misses one of their final assessments?

There are many possible reasons why a student may find themselves unable to attend one of their final assessments, whether due to temporary illness, temporary injury or some other event outside of a student's control. Where possible, we will arrange another time for them to complete the assessment. However, due to the shortened timeframe of the assessment period, this may be tricky. If completing the assessment at another time is not possible, teachers will refer to other sources of evidence when assessing their final grade.

The exam boards are only giving out past papers, how is this fair?

Most of the assessments provided by the exam boards will be drawn from past papers, although there will be new questions as well. There is significant research that even if students have seen assessments questions before, it does not reduce the validity of the assessment. Furthermore, exam board questions are only one of the many pieces of evidence we will use to assess students this summer.

Can students and parents make the case for why a student should get a higher grade?

Our teachers are already using their professional expertise to assess students on the content they have been taught. Teachers are unable to submit higher grades for students unless they have the evidence that they are consistently working at this level. If teachers submit higher grades without evidence they are committing exam malpractice.

In 2020, any undue pressure to increase grades placed on teachers by students or parents was also considered exam malpractice. It is likely to be the same for 2021. If students or parents are found to be putting teachers or leaders under undue pressure to increase grades, then this matter will be referred to the exam boards and an investigation into malpractice may ensue. This may result in the student's certificate being removed entirely if malpractice is deemed to have taken place.

Can students discuss their grades with teachers?

Teachers will be able to discuss which evidence they are using to inform their judgement with students, including marked or graded pieces of work.

However, we are not allowed to disclose their final submitted grade we give to the exam board.

Students should not attempt to second-guess the grade submitted, as teachers will be using a range of evidence to inform their final judgement. Students must not pressure teachers to reveal the grades they are submitting, or to increase the grades, as doing so may be considered exam malpractice.

What should students do to improve their grades?

The best thing students can do is to continue to attend classes, learn, act on feedback from their teachers, revise, and read around their subject. Their grade will be based on their performance, and so their outcomes are ultimately in their hands.

When will we know our results?

Year 13 students will receive their results on 10 August. Year 11 students will receive their results two days later on 12 August.

I've heard that we can appeal against grades if we disagree. How?

You could appeal but you need to know what the process is. If you appeal, the school has to check that we followed our processes which have been agreed with the exam board. That is all we look at. If we had not followed our own processes, the grade would be reassessed in accordance with the processes – this means it could go down as well as up. If we had followed our processes, then the grade will stand. You would then have to appeal to the examination board.

We will provide further information about our appeals process at a later point.

When do year 11 and 13 students finish school?

We are still trying to find out whether there will be any national expectations on attendance for Year 11 and 13 students after May half-term, or whether this will be left to individual schools and colleges to decide. We will update you about this as soon as we can.