

How qualifications will be awarded in 2021

As a result of the disruption students and learners have faced due to the pandemic, the government has said that many exams and assessments cannot be held this year in a way which is fair. All parts of the education system are working together to make sure that you are still able to get your grades and can carry on with your lives, whether that is continuing with education or training, or going into the workplace. To be of value, qualifications must reflect what you know, understand and can do and must be widely understood and respected.

We appreciate that this is a stressful time. There has been a great deal of uncertainty, and many of you will have missed out, not just on teaching and learning, but on the support offered by face-to-face contact with fellow students, friends, family and employers.

We recently consulted, jointly with the Department for Education, on alternative arrangements for exams and assessments that cannot go ahead as planned due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. Today we're publishing what we have decided to do. You can read our [General Qualifications decisions documents](#) and [Vocational and Technical Qualifications decisions documents](#) for full details. We are very grateful to all of you who responded to our consultations.

GCSEs, AS and A levels

For GCSEs, AS and A levels, teachers will assess the standard at which you are performing based only on what you have been taught so that your school or college can determine your grade. Teachers' judgements should be based on a range of evidence relating to the subject content that your teachers have delivered, either in the classroom or via remote learning.

Teachers will be able to use evidence about your performance gathered throughout your course to inform their judgement. This might include work that you have already completed, mock exam results, homework or in-class tests. Your teachers may also use questions from exam boards, largely based on past papers, to help assess you, but this won't be compulsory. Reasonable adjustments should be taken into account if you have a disability.

The arrangements for this year are designed so that teaching and learning can continue for as long as possible, so your teachers' judgement of your work should take place as late in the academic year as is practical. It's important that you keep engaged in your learning and study as long as possible so that your hard work can be considered in your grade. And it will stand you in good stead for the next stage of your life. Teachers will tell you which pieces of work will count towards your grade, before your grade is submitted to the exam board.

We know that some of you may be worried that you have not covered all the content for a particular subject. We will not set any requirements about the minimum amount of content that should be taught or assessed, but we will ask the head of your school or college to confirm that you have been taught enough content so that you can progress to the next stage of your education. We want you to make the best choices about your next steps and it wouldn't be helpful if you started studying a subject at a higher level that you might struggle with.

Please continue to work on your non-exam assessment (NEA) work or coursework, including for Project qualifications, wherever possible. We know that for some of you, this will be more difficult, especially if you need the specialist equipment at your school or college. Teachers will mark your NEA and it will contribute to your overall grade, whether or not it has been completed. We will treat Advanced Extension Awards and Project qualifications in the same way as GCSEs, AS and A levels.

For GCSE, AS and A level art and design, your grade will be based on your portfolio only, whether or not you have finished it. And for GCSE English language, GCSE modern foreign languages and A level sciences (biology, chemistry, physics and geology), your school or college should submit a separate grade or result for the spoken language or practical skills tested, based on work that you have completed.

Private candidates

If you are a private candidate studying independently, you will need to work with a school or college, or another exam centre, to provide evidence in line with the sort of evidence that other students will produce. You should receive your grade at the same time as other candidates. The Department for Education is working to make sure there are enough centres available, without it costing more than it normally would, and will publish more on this shortly.

Support materials

Exam boards will provide a package of support materials to schools, colleges and other exam centres, including questions and mark schemes. They will also give your teachers advice about choosing topics, marking, and making grading judgements. Wherever possible, the exam boards will base this material on questions that have appeared in past exam papers.

These support materials will be made available publicly at a date to be agreed. Use of these exam board support materials is not compulsory. They are there to help your teachers and they are part of the range of evidence your teachers could use to determine your grade.

Quality assurance

Exam boards will put in place quality assurance arrangements to make sure consistent judgements are being made and your head teacher or principal will

sign off all grades. Exam boards will also ask your school or college to confirm that they have followed the correct procedure for determining grades.

When you will get your results

We are working towards you receiving your results for AS and A levels on 10 August, and GCSEs on 12 August. Results for vocational or technical qualifications linked to moving on to further or higher education should also be issued to students either on or before these dates.

Appeals

A student unhappy with their grade would submit an appeal to the school or college, so that they could check whether an administrative error had been made. If a centre does find an error in the grade submitted, it can submit a revised grade for the board to consider. If a centre does not believe an error had been made, the centre will appeal to the exam board on the student's behalf, and will be supported to do so.

Vocational and technical qualifications (VTQ) students will be able to appeal on the same basis, but the exact nature of the processes might be a little different to reflect the different nature of the qualifications.

Next steps for GCSEs, AS and A levels

We will hold a short technical consultation so that we can put the necessary regulations in place to deliver these arrangements. We will do this quickly so that exam boards can confirm their guidance and the materials they will make available to your teachers as soon as possible.

Vocational and technical qualifications

Millions of vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) are awarded to learners each year. There are many different qualifications that we regulate – over 13,000 in total. They include short qualifications, such as functional skills qualifications, and longer courses such as BTECs.

Around 5,000 of these, representing a diverse range of qualifications, will need different arrangements this year so that they can be awarded. These range from entry level qualifications up to level 6 (broadly equivalent to degree level).

The way that VTQs will be awarded in 2021 allows for the challenges that are unique to this year. Many of you will have missed out on teaching and learning due to the disruption caused by the pandemic. Many of your workplaces may have been closed. Not all of you will have covered all of the curriculum content, especially for two-year courses.

We can't have a one-size-fits-all approach. As last year, for many qualifications, teacher judgement will play a central role – more so in some qualifications than others. Some exams and assessments, however, will still

go ahead this year either remotely, or in person where it is safe to do so.

These arrangements are not a perfect substitute for you being able to study and be assessed as you would be in an ordinary year. But they will enable you to be awarded a qualification that reflects what you know and can do so that you can progress to the next stage of your life.

Applied generals, including BTECs

If you are studying for a qualification that is similar to, or taken alongside GCSEs or A levels, then you will be eligible for a teacher assessed grade. This will require your teacher or lecturer to make an informed judgement on the grade you will receive using a variety of evidence, such as performance of tasks or assessments that have already been completed. We will regulate so that these qualifications can be awarded to you, even if your teachers or lecturers have incomplete assessment evidence for you.

Examples of these types of qualifications are BTECs (Pearson) and OCR Cambridge Technicals in subjects such as engineering, digital media and health and social care. They also include Pre-U and core maths.

You should receive your results no later than students who are studying for GCSEs and A levels.

International Baccalaureate exams have been cancelled for the UK and we will be able to say more about how they will be awarded after a short technical consultation, which should conclude by mid-March.

Functional skills, English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Skills for Life

If you need to take a qualification in Functional Skills, for example, in order to complete your apprenticeship, then you should still be able to take your assessment, in line with public health measures. There may also be alternative arrangements for you if this is not possible. Teacher assessed grades will be used where you cannot access an in-person or remote assessment.

Professional or occupational qualifications

If you are studying for a qualification that requires a demonstration of professional competence, then you will need to be assessed on your practical skills before you can get your certificate and progress to the workplace.

Assessments for these types of qualifications should be continuing throughout 2021, although your assessment may be held in slightly different circumstances to normal, using social distancing or remote assessment, for example. We previously allowed awarding organisations some flexibility to adapt how they assessed your work and we will carry on this flexibility.

In some cases, your assessment may need to be delayed until it can be carried

out safely in line with public health guidance.

Examples of these types of qualification are: plumbing, hairdressing, electrics, construction and veterinary work.

Your awarding organisation will let your centre (college or training provider) know when you are likely to receive your results.

Next steps for VTQ

We are collecting data from all awarding organisations about how results for each type of qualification will be awarded. We will publish this information in an interactive 'explainer tool' on [our website](#) in the next few weeks.

The awarding organisation responsible for awarding your qualification, such as NOCN or NCFE, will be getting in touch with your learning provider (school or college) to let them know what evidence is needed for different types of qualification in order for grades to be awarded. They will publish more information on their website today, and in the coming days.

You need to continue to study. You will be able to talk to your teacher or learning provider about what's happening with your qualification in the near future, and whether you will be able to take your assessment or if your grade will be awarded in another way.

We will keep updating our website when we have more details so please do keep checking in with us. We know that this is a challenging time, but we are working to put arrangements in place so that students, parents, teachers and everyone who relies on these qualifications can be assured of the fairest possible arrangements in this pandemic.