

Teacher assessed grades for students

Students will receive grades awarded and determined by teachers, with pupils only assessed on what they have been taught, the Education Secretary announced today (Thursday, 25 February).

Fairness and flexibility are at the heart of the Government's plans to ensure young people get to their next stage of education or training.

Teachers will be able to draw on a range of evidence when determining grades, including the optional use of questions provided by exam boards, as well as mock exams, coursework, or other work completed as part of a pupil's course, such as essays or in-class tests. No algorithm will be used.

Teachers will submit grades to exam boards by 18 June, allowing as much teaching time as possible before teachers make their assessments.

Results days for GCSE, A level and some vocational qualifications will take place in the week of 9 August – moved forward from the week of the 23 August. These earlier dates provide additional time for appeals to be completed, so students reliant on those outcomes to achieve their university offer have the best chance of accessing a place.

To support teachers in making their judgements, exam boards will provide detailed guidance before the end of the spring term.

Staff across education have been going above and beyond to support young people through the pandemic, and the guidance published by boards will be designed to minimise any additional burden this year's awarding process may place in teachers and staff.

Students studying vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) that are often taught alongside GCSEs and A levels on one or two year courses, and used for university or college places, will also receive grades assessed by teachers rather than sitting exams.

Exams and assessments will continue in VTQs where they are needed for students to demonstrate the necessary professional standard in an occupation.

Schools, colleges and other educational settings will conduct multiple checks – such as checking consistency of judgements across teachers and that the correct processes were followed – to ensure as much fairness as possible.

At the same time, exam boards will conduct their own checks, through a combination of random sampling and more targeted scrutiny where they identify cause for concern.

Every student will have the right to appeal their grade.

The proposals being taken forward were supported in responses to the department and Ofqual's largest ever consultation, with over 100,000

responses of which just over half (52%) came from pupils.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Young people have shown incredible resilience over the last year, continuing with their learning amidst unprecedented challenges while the country battles with this pandemic. Those efforts deserve to be fairly rewarded.

That's why we are providing the fairest possible system for those pupils, asking those who know them best – their teachers – to determine their grades, with our sole aim to make sure all young people can progress to the next stage of their education or career.

I also recognise many students need their vocational and technical qualifications to enter into work. Exams and practical assessments in these courses are essential for the students to progress to the next stage, and so it's right that these continue.

Ofqual's Interim Chief Regulator Simon Lebus said:

We know how difficult this past year has been for many students, parents, schools and colleges. In normal years, we rely on exams to support students' progression.

This year it is teachers' judgement that will be used to assess what has been learned and determine student grades. Assessment cannot itself serve as an instrument to recover lost learning and compensate for the different experiences students will have had in different parts of the country, and the arrangements being put in place will therefore only take into account what students have been taught, not what they have missed. The aim is to make it no harder overall for this year's students to receive a particular grade than students in other years.

I am confident that these arrangements will allow all parts of the education and training sector to work together collectively to make sure students' grades reflect what they have achieved and provide a sound basis to enable them to make good decisions about their future.

There will also be a clear and accessible route for private candidates to work with a centre to receive a grade this year, at the same time as other candidates. Exam boards will provide centres with clear guidance on the evidence they can use to assess a private candidate. A list of available centres will be published shortly and, we are working with the sector to ensure there are sufficient centres available and at a similar cost to a normal year.

Leora Cruddas, Chief Executive of the Confederation of School Trusts, said:

This year the Government has made clear that the process for awarding grades should be based on teachers' professional judgement. There is a reasonable consensus that teacher judgement will need to be both supported, scaffolded and quality assured. This is because although the pandemic has had a damaging impact, we still want assessment outcomes this year to reflect something objective.

The DfE and Ofqual's response to the consultation has had to balance carefully the views of multiple stakeholders. The arrangements that are being announced today will provide welcome certainty as to what schools, trusts and colleges are being asked to do.

John Jolly, Chief Executive, Parentkind, said:

It's clear from our research that what matters most to parents when it comes to their children's exams is fairness. The majority of parents believe that teacher assessment is, under the circumstances, the fairest way to test pupils and award them with grades that reflect their knowledge and understanding. They also want to see a range of evidence taken into account when determining grades.

We therefore fully support the DfE's commitment to avoid assessing on a full curriculum this year, which very few parents want, as well as finding flexible ways for teachers to assess pupils' work based on what they have learnt. Clarity over the new arrangements for this summer's exams, which take parents' views into account, provides parents and students alike with peace of mind. Exam cohorts can now focus on a successful conclusion to their studies.

Martyn Oliver, Chief Executive of Outwood Grange Academies Trust said:

Children have experienced very different levels of learning since last March and the arrangements announced today will bring a great sense of relief. Teachers, who know their pupils best, are being trusted and supported to ensure that all pupils are given a grade based upon what they have covered and not on what they may have missed. In a difficult time for everyone, this is the fairest system possible that will help children progress in their education, training or employment.

Hamid Patel, Chief Executive of Star Academies said:

The arrangements announced by DfE today for 2021 examinations provide fairness, certainty and reflect feedback to Ofqual's wide-ranging consultation with schools, parents and pupils. Our young people can be confident that their hard work and achievement will be properly recognised and that they will have a solid foundation for the next stage of their journey.

Qualification results awarded using alternative assessment arrangements in 2020/21 will not be used to create performance table measures at school or college level for use in accountability. More details on what this means for accountability arrangements in 2020/21 will follow shortly.