

Ofqual's approach to grading exams and assessments in summer 2022 and autumn 2021

Overview

Ofqual has statutory objectives to maintain standards and promote public confidence in exams and qualifications. We also have a duty to have regard to the interests of learners, which we interpret as fairness. We want to get back quickly to the pre-pandemic standard, but in the interests of fairness, and balancing these objectives, we won't do so in one jump. Instead, 2022 will be a transition year to reflect that we are in a pandemic recovery period and students' education has been disrupted. In 2022 we will aim, therefore, to reflect a midway point between 2021 and 2019. In 2023 we aim to return to results that are in line with those in pre-pandemic years.

This approach will recognise the disruption experienced by students taking exams in 2022, over their course of study, and so provide a safety net for those who might otherwise just miss out on a higher grade. Results overall will be higher than in 2019, but not as high as in 2020.

As usual, our rules will require exam boards to use a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence so that grade boundaries are set in a way that is as fair as possible for all students, across all subjects and exam boards. Grading is monitored by the experts every step of the way. And, as usual, we will review results for every subject before they are issued.

Background

For the past 2 years, summer exams haven't been able to take place and, instead, students have been awarded grades by their teachers.

In summer 2020, the government decided that exams could not take place safely. As the pandemic continued it disrupted education to such an extent, and so unevenly, that government decided it would have been unfair to ask students to sit exams as they normally would in summer 2021, given the differences in the amount of the curriculum that different schools and colleges had been able to teach.

Using grades assessed by teachers and checked by centres was the right thing to do in the exceptional circumstances of the pandemic. It meant students could receive grades and move on with their lives, and their grades took account of the disruption caused by the pandemic.

Adaptations for 2022

Arrangements have been put in place for summer 2022 to support students and make exams fairer for them. The government has introduced a choice of topics or content in some GCSE exams and exam boards will give advance information about the focus of the content of exams, designed to provide guidance for revision for students ahead of summer exams, and study aids will be allowed in some exams.

How we will provide a grading safety net

As we return to summer exams, in 2022 exam boards will set the grade boundaries based on a profile that reflects a midpoint between 2021 and pre-pandemic grading.

This will provide a safety net for students, to reflect the disruption this cohort have experienced already in their course and recognising the fact that, because of the pandemic, most A level students won't have taken public exams before.

Our aim is to return to a pre-pandemic grade profile. But we don't think it would be fair on 2022's students to do it all in one go, given the disruption they have experienced. We will aim, therefore, to return in broadly 2 steps.

As in any other year, exam boards will use data as a starting point, to align their standards in a subject. That will be based on an average of 2019 and 2021 results for each subject. But the grade boundaries for each specification will be set by the senior examiners, after they have reviewed the work produced by students.

Results overall will be higher than in 2019, and not as high as in 2020. The exact position may vary by subject and by grade. At this stage we can't be precise because schools and colleges haven't made entries yet – shifts in entry patterns can mean results look different, for example as more or fewer able students than in previous years enter for each subject – and of course senior examiners haven't reviewed any work because students haven't yet taken their exams. As in any year when students take exams, there is no pre-determined 'quota' of grades. This approach allows us to begin to re-establish pre-pandemic relationships between subjects.

Essentially, it's about being as fair as we can be to students. Students' learning has been disrupted due to the pandemic through no fault of their own, and our approach, will take account of that.

Our transitional, midpoint approach in 2022 will create a grade distribution that is generous compared to 2019 but as fair as possible to students. Grades will be based on how students have performed in exams: they will be meaningful and can be trusted by universities, colleges and employers.

Autumn 2021

A small number of students will take autumn exams starting next week. These exams, with the exception of the usual November sittings for GCSE English language and maths, are for those students who want to improve on their grade from summer 2021 or who had planned to enter in summer 2021 but were unable to obtain a teacher assessed grade. For this reason, exam boards will seek to align autumn 2021 grading with summer 2021. This is [the same approach we took in autumn 2020](#), when grading was aligned to summer 2020.

UCAS predicted grades

Teachers this term will be predicting the grades their students will receive in summer 2022 for use on their higher education applications. [In line with UCAS guidance](#), many students will already have been given an indication of their predicted grades by their teachers.

The UCAS guidance suggests that predicted grades should be aspirational but achievable and the guidance considers the risks of inflating predicted grades as well as the risks of suppressing them.

It is challenging for teachers to accurately predict grades at the best of times. In recent pre-pandemic years, overall grades have been generously predicted by teachers. For 2022, we recommend that teachers use the familiar 2019 standard as the basis for predicting their students' grades, giving borderline students the benefit of any doubt. So if a teacher believes a student is likely to be on the borderline between 2 grades, they predict the higher one.

Vocational and technical qualifications

The decision on the approach to grading GCSEs and A levels will have an impact on certain vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) used for similar purposes, including progressing to further study. Our regulatory framework requires awarding organisations to secure, as far as it is possible, that VTQ learners are not disadvantaged nor advantaged compared with their GCSE and A level peers. To do this we expect them to take account of the approach for GCSEs and A levels when setting standards in their own qualifications.

Conclusion

For the past 2 years, a higher proportion of students each year received top grades compared to pre-pandemic years. It's important that we get back to exams and other formal assessments, so that students have the fairest chance to show what they know, understand and can do, with all students taking the same assessments, which are set, marked and graded by the exam boards. And it's important that we start to move back to the position we were in before the pandemic to make sure we are setting young people up for university, college or employment in the best possible way.

Fairness has been foremost in our minds when thinking about exams this autumn and next year, with students' interests driving our decisions – both this year's students and past and future students.

The interests of learners are central to Ofqual's mandate. For us, that means fairness, and qualifications that stand the test of time, that employers, colleges and universities can trust.

[Gill wins award for championing menopause conversations](#)

News story

An LLWR colleague has been presented with an award for helping to normalise discussions about the menopause.



Gill Bragg, Head of Internal Audit, won the Business Champion Award at the Diverse Cumbria Awards, which celebrate those making a push for equality, diversity and inclusion across the county.

Gill has created a 'Menopause in the Workplace' community where colleagues can share experience, offer advice and support each other. She also led open forums for male and female colleagues to come together and talk about how the menopause affects them, their partners or family members.

As a result, female colleagues feel more comfortable talking about menopause in the workplace, while male colleagues are better equipped to understand and support their colleagues.

Gill was unable to attend the ceremony so Craig Ashton, Director of Waste Services and ED&I Champion at LLWR collected the award on Gill's behalf. He said:

Over the past couple of years, Gill has worked tirelessly to raise

awareness internally and across the NDA group about the menopause and its impact on people.

Like many issues, we choose not to talk about menopause but Gill felt that this was something that needed to be discussed openly, a goal she has achieved with her passion and commitment to the cause.

It's fitting that this award is announced during National Inclusion Week, as the NDA group launches a new strategy which will embed inclusivity into the group's culture.

Well done Gill, we at LLWR are all really proud of you.

Published 29 September 2021

[All parties to Israeli-Palestinian conflict must be open to further dialogue](#)

Thank you Madam President, and my thanks to the Special Coordinator for his briefing, and the quarterly report on implementation of resolution 2334.

I'd also like to thank Mai Farsakh and Meredith Rothbart for their remarks, their insights and your work on the ground. And I'd like to pay tribute too to them and to all those in civil society who work to build social peace and the foundations for peace.

Madam President, the United Kingdom welcomes recent engagement between the Israeli Government and the Palestinian leadership, including the meeting between Palestinian President Abbas and Israeli Defence Minister Gantz on 29 August. We urge further direct engagement and call on both parties to work together to tackle immediate and long-term threats to peace and stability. While appreciating the difficulties on both sides, we urge all parties to be open to further dialogue.

The UK wants to see greater cooperation between Israelis and Palestinians, including on economic initiatives, to help support the recovery of Gaza, boost the Palestinian economy and improve the lives of all Palestinians living in the OPTs.

However, these initiatives need to be part of a political pathway. All parties need to take steps to avoid exacerbating tensions, and to avoid unhelpful rhetoric. Existing agreements must be respected and all parties must refrain from harmful unilateral actions.

Madam President, we remain concerned by Israel's ongoing settlement expansion, as well as the demolition of Palestinian property and resultant displacement of protected persons, such as prospective demolitions and evictions in Silwan, Walaja, and Sheikh Jarrah. We urge Israel to allow for more legal avenues for Palestinian construction.

As has been noted previously, we have seen a worrying upward trend in Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces' live fire throughout 2021; particularly around Beita where eight Palestinians have been killed by the Israel Defence Forces since May. We urge restraint on all sides. Israeli investigations should be transparent, comprehensive and, where there has been excessive use of force, those responsible held to account.

We condemn any incidence of violence by settlers against Palestinian civilians and aid workers. We express particular concern about the reported attack on 15-year-old Palestinian, Tareq Zubeidi, on 17 August. Communities must be protected from violence and harassment. Such incidents must be investigated fully and those responsible brought to justice.

Madam President, we continue to call on the Palestinian Authority to adhere to international standards on freedom of expression, association and assembly and urge respect for human rights. Reform is needed to rebuild trust with the public.

I reiterate that the UK condemns unequivocally Hamas's indiscriminate attacks against Israel, including the use of incendiary balloons. We call upon Hamas and other terrorist groups to permanently end their rocket fire against Israel.

Finally Madam President, turning to Gaza, the UK welcomed Israeli Foreign Minister Lapid's speech proposing positive policy suggestions to support economic development in Gaza and greater security for Israel. A long-term solution for Gaza is needed not only to end the cycle of violence, but also to make progress towards the two-state solution: a solution to which the UK remains firmly committed.

The Chief Inspector holds the first of his new Migration Forums with a focus on the education sector.

News story

The new forum joins the other ICIBI stakeholder groups that advise on specific areas such as maritime, aviation, adults at risk, and refugee and

asylum issues.



Representatives from [Universities UK](#), [the Russell Group](#), [UK Council for International Student Affairs](#), [MillionPlus](#) and the [Boarding Schools' Association](#) attended the meeting, which provided an opportunity for the Chief Inspector to hear first-hand about their experience of the immigration system as it relates to the education sector.

Following the forum the Chief Inspector said,

I am grateful to those who attended today's inaugural meeting and contributed to the productive discussions. I look forward to our next engagement and the opportunity for the group to assist me in shaping and influencing my future inspection programme.

Published 29 September 2021

[G7 Finance Ministers meeting to discuss global tax reform](#)

News story

Chancellor Rishi Sunak chaired a virtual meeting with G7 finance ministers today (Wednesday) to discuss international tax reform.



A HM Treasury Spokesperson said:

The UK chaired a productive G7 Finance Ministers' discussion on international tax reform, where a common understanding was reached on some important remaining issues, to support reaching political agreement amongst members of the OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework countries next week. All re-iterated their commitment to working together as a group to ensure that reforms are implemented to an ambitious timeline.

Published 29 September 2021