

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

EMERGING PRINCIPLES AND GUIDANCE REGARDING TEACHER-ASSESSED GRADES FOR SUMMER 2020

Following the decision that no public examinations will take place during this summer, school and college leaders and teachers are beginning to address how the process of assigning grades to pupils will operate. ASCL is in close contact with Ofqual, DfE and awarding organisations on a regular basis as this process is hammered out.

There are a number of important principles to bear in mind regarding this process.

The government has determined that schools and colleges will not be held to account for their performance based on this summer's teacher-assessed grades. It is essential, therefore, that school and college leaders and teachers put headline measures out of their minds when approaching this exercise. It is entirely about ensuring the students receive reasonable grades so that their own lives are as unaffected as possible. It is not about school ranking.

We would expect that the national picture for teacher-assessed grades will be broadly similar to that which would have occurred if the students concerned had actually taken their exams. It is understandable that teachers might want to give more students the benefit of the doubt by, for example, awarding more grade 4s than they might otherwise have obtained. But this would be wrong for several reasons:

- Awarding organisations and Ofqual will take steps to ensure that grade distributions resemble previous years. Where centres produce grades which seem particularly generous, a moderation process will be applied.
- Assuming that things head back to normal for the 2021 cohort, an inflated picture in 2020 would disadvantage those students currently in Year 10 and Year 12. They have enough to contend with having had their own studies disrupted.
- This is an opportunity for the profession as a whole to show that it can, and will, produce reasonable grades through the process of teacher assessment. For those who believe that the current system of examinations at 16 is inappropriate there is a chance here to show that an alternative universe is possible.

The process of allocating grades to students has some difficult ethical issues associated with it. We know that there are historic differences in performance between girls and boys, between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers and so on. For this reason, teachers should ask themselves the question "What grade would this particular student most plausibly have achieved if they were taking the exam?". This is not to be confused with a target grade, which might have an inflationary effect if used instead. Whilst we should as a profession be exercised about the inequalities which are present in the system, this is not the moment or the method to put it right.

There are tools which can help teachers carry out this process. The DfE publishes transition matrices each year showing how pupils perform nationally in many subjects, broken down by their Key Stage 2 starting points.

Here is the transition matrix for GCSE Geography for pupils who took the exam in 2019:

Pupil Percentage		KS4 Attainment									
		U	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
KS2 Attainment	W	0	32	23	23	9	5	9	0	0	0
	1	18	23	23	18	6	4	1	1	3	4
	2	15	43	26	9	3	2	1	0	0	0
	3c	11	35	34	15	3	2	1	0	0	0
	3b	8	29	34	20	5	2	1	0	0	0
	3a	5	22	34	25	8	4	1	0	0	0
	4c	4	15	28	30	13	6	3	1	0	0
	4b	2	8	20	30	18	12	6	2	1	0
	4a	1	4	11	23	20	19	14	6	2	0
	5c	0	1	4	12	15	21	22	15	7	2
	5b	0	0	1	4	7	14	21	24	19	9
	5a	0	0	0	1	1	4	11	22	29	31

Nationally, of all the pupils with KS2 Level 4a, 23% gained grade 3, 20% a grade 4 and 19% a grade 5, and so on.

This shows, as one would expect, that pupils with higher prior attainment tend to get higher grades. But it also shows that a range of outcomes happen in practice. Pupils with a high level 4 are roughly as likely to get a grade 3, a grade 4 or a grade 5 nationally. Only the teacher of each pupil would know which of those grades would best apply to an individual pupil.

Whilst the grades of individual pupils might vary in this way, we would expect the cohort of pupils in a typical centre to have a closer resemblance to the national distribution of grades. Overall, we might expect the grades of 4a pupils doing geography in a typical school to be similar to the percentages above. This alignment is the guiding principle by which awarding organisations and Ofqual will check the process is reasonable as it ensures consistency from year to year.

We would expect there to be some differences across schools and colleges, however. Awarding organisations know which centres tend to perform better than others over time, and this is one of the criteria they will apply when moderating the grades. Teachers can tell if their centre performed well in their subject by looking at the ASCL toolkit to be found at www.ascl.smidreport.com (a login is required; please check with the appropriate school leader to see if your school has already registered and uploaded the required data). They could also check output from other providers if their school has access. Note that within any individual school, it is common for some subjects to perform above average, and others below.

We would therefore suggest the process teachers should use to address this task is as follows:

- For each pupil, consider what grade would be the most plausible if they were actually going to take the exam in the summer.
- Rank order the students within those grades, so that if the gradings need to be adjusted, then it is clear which pupils would be affected, in either direction. This is a difficult process and relies on teachers being fair and reasonable with their own pupils but also understanding the same process is being applied everywhere else.
- Finally, consider whether the cohort of pupils and their grades taken together would be what you would have expected on results day, and whether it resembles the national picture derived from DfE transition matrices, taking into account whether that individual subject in that school performs above or below national average. Above all, does it look fair?

On a practical note, ASCL would advise teachers and leaders that they should not be seeking any further work from students at this point to support teacher-assessed grades. Not all students will be able to respond; some will be ill whilst others will be living under more difficult circumstances at home. We believe the priorities for pupils in Year 11 and 13 are to ensure that they complete the curriculum in the subjects which they wish to pursue in the following year, not to add collateral to the assessment process.

Detailed guidance will shortly emerge from Ofqual and the regulators for Wales and Northern Ireland about how this process will work. Schools and colleges should ensure they follow this carefully.

There is no need to rush; what is important is that the process is well thought through and works in the best interest of students. We greatly appreciate that many of our members have their own ideas and concerns about all of this. We would like to reassure all of them that everyone involved is working hard and with great sensitivity to make this fair. Above all, this process will only work if the profession works together in a consistent, fair and ethical way. The students affected by this deserve nothing less.

Duncan Baldwin | ASCL Deputy Director of Policy
30 March 2020

The guidance provided in this document is for general information purposes only and does not constitute legal or professional advice. They represent ASCL's views, but you rely on them at your own risk. For specific advice relevant to your particular circumstances, please contact your employer's HR service or legal advisers.



0116 2991122



info@ascl.org.uk



ascl.org.uk