

CORONAVIRUS (COVID-19)

GUIDANCE REGARDING CENTRE-ASSESSED GRADES FOR SUMMER 2020

This paper should be read in conjunction with our earlier paper [Coronavirus: Emerging principles and guidance regarding teacher-assessed grades for summer 2020](#). It incorporates guidance and information published by Ofqual.

Suggestions for process and indicative timeline

The timeline below is indicative; other approaches are possible but there are some key principles which are essential for all centres. The details will vary from school to school (and college to college), but the overall sequence is likely to be similar. Ofqual has confirmed that the submission deadline will not be before 29 May 2020.

| Stage | Action | Completed by |
|---------|---|--------------------|
| Stage 1 | Subject leaders collate information about which objective evidence could be used in the process, including progress on NEAs. This can be started now. | Tuesday 21 April |
| Stage 2 | Decision made by subject leaders regarding the evidence they propose to use to create an overall mark for each student. | Wednesday 22 April |
| Stage 3 | Discussion with senior leaders over evidence base and mark calculation decisions to ensure fair and robust process. | Friday 24 April |
| Stage 4 | Subjects calculate the overall mark for each student from the evidence base and carefully check the calculations. | Friday 1 May |
| Stage 5 | Discussion with senior leader regarding Stage 4 calculations to quality assure process and detail. | Wednesday 6 May |
| Stage 6 | Recommendation of grades (and ranking students within grades) by subject teachers and leaders based on Stages 4 and 5 submitted to senior leaders. | Monday 11 May |
| Stage 7 | Moderation of grades by senior leaders using national distributions and understanding of past centre performance. | Friday 15 May |
| Stage 8 | Explanation of process with governors and trustees. | Friday 22 May |

Context

The Ofqual guidance directs centres to make estimates of grades and rankings which will then be checked and moderated. This gives schools, colleges and teachers the flexibility within overall parameters to be as fair as possible to pupils within each subject. Headteachers and senior leaders will be actively engaged in ensuring that the grades submitted by their school or college are appropriate and that there is an overall process of control and oversight.

It is worth each school and college considering how it wishes to manage this process, recognising that each school will be different. Some subject leaders may have started thinking and acting immediately following Ofqual's announcement, but they may rush through parts of this process without enough consideration. It will be helpful for a senior leader to communicate with subject leaders to outline the process, to suggest they think about what objective evidence they have and how they will ensure that the process is fair to all students.

It is essential that the grades and outcomes in 2020 are in line with previous cohorts. Doing otherwise would be unfair to the pupils in Year 11 and 13 and to pupils in other years.

We advise centres to use the term 'centre-assessed grades', rather than 'calculated grade' or 'teacher-assessed grade' because it correctly focusses responsibility of the centre rather than the individual teacher.

The Ofqual guidance and this document only apply to qualifications which they regulate. Others such as iGCSE have their own processes. It is anticipated that vocational and technical qualifications will have a similar process.

Key principles

Teachers need to estimate grades. Rankings alone would be insufficient.

Teacher grade estimates rather than just rankings give additional information about the internal distribution of candidates. For example:

- a purely statistical model may predict 20 students each attaining grades 7,6,5 in their subject. But teachers at the centre would know that the actual performance of the candidates might be clustered as, say, 15 students with grade 7, 30 with grade 6 and 15 with grade 5. This allocation would be fairer to the candidates, but not inflate the overall and average grades.
- small subjects where there is a practical component may generate grades which are quite different from predictions. For example, in music there might be four candidates who should get 9,8,5,4 because of widely different practical ability compared to a distribution based on prior attainment such as 7,7,6,6, which generates the same average. A ranking process alone would be deeply unfair in this case.

Candidates need an objective mark in each subject

Whilst Ofqual only require schools and colleges to submit grades and rankings for pupils, a vital intermediate step at centre level is first to produce a mark for each pupil in each subject and then move to the grades and rankings from that mark. The **absolute** value of the mark does not matter and is not related to grade boundaries, but the **relative** value of the mark will give both the ranking and, importantly, a sense of the distribution and clustering of the students as indicated in the examples above.

Starting the process by sorting a list of pupils without objective information will be more prone to unconscious bias.

Ofqual description of basis of grades submitted

Ofqual's guidance states: *"The centre assessment grades submitted to exam boards must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the most likely grade a student would have achieved if they had sat their exams this summer and completed any non-exam assessment. Heads of Centre should emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair."*

Note that this is quite different from an estimate based on target grades, or indeed a notion of what grade a candidate deserves to attain. The aim is for teachers to emulate the grades which the exam itself would have generated. Implicit in this task are the existing historic differences in the system. For example, boys and girls have attained at a similar level in mathematics GCSE in recent years, but girls outperform boys in English Language.

Types of evidence

The Ofqual guidance gives a wide range of evidence which could be considered and gives schools and colleges the flexibility for each subject to make a decision so that the outcome is "objective and fair." An overall mark for each student will help to focus attention on the need for objective quantifiable evidence to help deal with issues such as parental pressure and unconscious bias.

Having several pieces of evidence will help deal with any potential complaints about a particular assessment and can be used to test the impact of different sets of weightings for the components such as mock exam results, non-examined assessment and work completed during the course.

Techniques for combining different tests to give single overall mark

It may be that within a single assessment for a subject, different groups of students sat different papers e.g subjects which have tiered entry. Separate technical advice will be issued on a possible approach to bring results into a single mark order.

Special consideration

Centres should think through how they will approach special consideration requests. Decide where they should be directed and how to separate them from those doing the grading until a final stage. The same guiding principle about determining the most plausible grade based on what is known still applies to students in this category.

Grading decisions

Under the timeline above, the allocation of grades will not be taking place until early May which gives enough time to be clear about which grades are appropriate for each subject in a school or college. We expect assessment systems providers such as FFT to provide additional tools to help with the process. Ofqual and the exam boards will also finalise and consult on the standardisation process over the next few weeks.

The transition matrix methodology outlined in the previous ASCL “Emerging Principles” needs to underpin the decisions made at a school level and is consistent with the existing methodology used by exam boards to ensure that outcomes each year are similar to previous years. The KS2 results in 2015 were very similar to those in 2014 at a national level. This means that we can use the national DfE subject transition matrices for Summer 2019 as the basis for the estimation process for current Year 11 using their KS2 scores. It also lets us make fair estimates for those pupils without KS2 grades because of the overall mark allocated to all pupils as outlined above.

Calculating a starting grade distribution for a given subject

It is possible to calculate a grade distribution on the assumption that the school is in line with national average, in this case for English Language (i.e. its value added is around zero). Suppose that of the 218 students in the cohort 200 of them have a KS2 score, with the following distribution:

| KS2 sub-level | 2 | 3c | 3b | 3a | 4c | 4b | 4a | 5c | 5b | 5a | |
|---------------|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|----|-----|
| no. students | 5 | 3 | 5 | 12 | 27 | 39 | 43 | 45 | 17 | 4 | 200 |

The DfE transition matrix for English Language is:

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|---|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---|
| 9 | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 2% | 6% | 20% | 9 |
| 8 | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 2% | 6% | 13% | 23% | 8 |
| 7 | 0% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 2% | 6% | 12% | 20% | 24% | 7 |
| 6 | 3% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 2% | 5% | 9% | 16% | 24% | 27% | 20% | 6 |
| 5 | 8% | 3% | 2% | 3% | 5% | 8% | 14% | 20% | 26% | 27% | 20% | 9% | 5 |
| 4 | 13% | 6% | 6% | 9% | 13% | 18% | 23% | 25% | 23% | 17% | 9% | 2% | 4 |
| 3 | 23% | 17% | 28% | 38% | 41% | 43% | 39% | 31% | 20% | 10% | 4% | 1% | 3 |
| 2 | 31% | 24% | 37% | 32% | 27% | 20% | 13% | 8% | 4% | 2% | 1% | 0% | 2 |
| 1 | 15% | 33% | 21% | 13% | 9% | 6% | 4% | 2% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 1 |
| U | 8% | 13% | 6% | 4% | 3% | 2% | 1% | 1% | 1% | 0% | 0% | 0% | U |
| | W | 1 | 2 | 3c | 3b | 3a | 4c | 4b | 4a | 5c | 5b | 5a | |

If the school is perfectly in line with the national picture, then of the 43 students with KS2 sub-level 4a 1% would get a grade U, 1% a grade 1, 4% a grade 2, 20% grade 3 and so on. Note that there is some rounding error involved. Also note that U grades will be a normal part of this process; removing U grades, for example by withdrawing entries, will distort the centre distribution. The statistical moderation process used by Ofqual and the awarding organisations will assume that there are U grades in centre assessments.

This leads to an estimate that the students with KS2 Level 4a will gain the following grades:

| grade | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | U | |
|--------------|---|---|---|---|----|----|---|---|---|---|----|
| no. students | 0 | 1 | 2 | 7 | 11 | 10 | 9 | 2 | 1 | 0 | 43 |

Repeating the process for each KS2 sub-level gives an overall total grade distribution of:

| grade | 9 | 8 | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | U | |
|--------------|---|---|----|----|----|----|----|----|---|---|-----|
| no. students | 3 | 7 | 13 | 28 | 40 | 39 | 46 | 16 | 6 | 2 | 200 |

Placing the students in mark order will give the ranking and allow an initial allocation of grades to take place: i.e. the first 3 get grade 9, next 7 get grade 8 and so on.

However, a closer scrutiny of the mark distribution might show clustering, i.e. the 10th, 11th, 12th student might have almost identical marks, and so it would seem fair to also allocate the 12th student to grade 8. But you then need to look for a similar clustering in the opposite direction so that overall, as many pupils are moved up as down.

Why the final grade distribution may be different from national predictions

This is the most complex and sensitive part of the whole process both in principle and in practice.

The Ofqual guidance states:

"We are working with technical experts within exam boards and others to develop this model, which will combine a range of evidence including

- *expected grade distributions at national level*
- *results in previous years at individual centre level*
- *the prior attainment profile of students at centre level"*

Schools and colleges can get a good idea of last year's performance relative to the national picture for each subject by using the ASCL Toolkit at www.ascl.smidreport.com. This makes clear how different groups performed relative to their peers nationally by making like-for-like comparisons. The toolkit can also be used to assist with the centre assessment process; please follow the appropriate link at the above page.

It would be appropriate to adjust assessed grades upwards or downwards based on centre performance in particular subjects. Typically subjects vary within schools so one would expect centre-assessed grades to reflect this variation.

Modern foreign languages

Ofqual has announced that historically severe grading in French and German will begin to be adjusted in 2020. The intention is to bring grading in these subjects in line with Spanish.

Rather than assuming this correction at centre level, teachers should follow the process of estimating grades using historic grading. Ofqual and the awarding organisations will then consider these grades and make an adjustment accordingly.

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