

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a pencil, poised to write on a piece of paper. The background is softly blurred, showing a desk with other papers and a book. A white rectangular box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the title and author's name.

A guide to teacher assessment and ranking

Tom Middlehurst

About this guide

Published in May 2020, this guide is intended to be used by headteachers, principals and other senior leaders in schools to help them lead the process of teacher assessment and ranking for GCSE, AS and A levels this summer. It may also be helpful for heads of department, teachers and school governors and trust leaders.

The following steps are a guide only, and schools will need to adapt these to their own context and situation. Any factual information is correct at the time of going to press, but in these extraordinary times, things are moving very quickly, so schools are urged to check any key information when making decisions.

This guide uses the terms 'centre' and 'school' interchangeably. Likewise, we use 'candidate' and 'student' interchangeably. 'Centre' and 'candidate' are the terms Ofqual and the awarding organisations (exam boards) use, so we have tended to use these when discussing a technical matter.

Thanks go to Chris Baker and Dylan Wiliam for their support and advice in our live seminar on this topic (watch at bit.ly/35EttXy), and whose ideas have helped generate this resource.

Ongoing support is available from SSAT

Learn more at ssatuk.co.uk or by getting in touch with your school's Relationship Manager by emailing RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk.

Guiding principles

It is useful to consider the guiding principles that underpin this document, and for schools to reflect on their own principles during this process.

- Decisions should be made in the interests of students' needs and to support their progression. Many tough decisions face schools, such as whether to enter some younger students as planned, or to withdraw them and enter them into later exam series. In making these decisions, leaders should be guided by what's right for the students themselves.
- National data, transition matrices, and previous results can tell us so much about what a school's results may look like, but do not tell the whole story.
- Teachers know their students best, and this should be the starting point for decisions.
- Schools should be very mindful of conscious and unconscious bias in the process. Parents should be gently reminded that their 'helpful' comments about their children's academic progress during lockdown is not useful and may put pressure on individual teachers.
- It is tempting to use this exceptional time to adjust for educational inequalities. Obviously SSAT are deeply committed to social justice and ending educational disadvantage. However, it's a sad fact of life that educational inequality does exist. 2020 is not the year that will change that. You are being asked to give a professional and honest judgement on what a student would have got, had they sat the exams as normal. This is therefore likely to maintain existing inequalities within the system.
- It is in the whole profession's interest that this summer's awards are conducted in a professional manner and with integrity. It is an opportunity to show that teacher assessment is more reliable than examination; but if a large minority of centres are seen to 'inflate' their grades beyond national expectations, then this will be used as evidence that teacher assessment is unreliable.
- Remember that GCSEs and A-level results are never perfect. There is always a margin of error. There will be this year too. It's important schools make professional judgements and submit their grades and ranks as accurately as possible, but the rank order is unlikely to ever be 'perfect'.

Possible process

1. Classroom teachers are asked to reach a judgement on what each of their students was most likely to have achieved had they sat the exams this summer.
2. Simultaneously, curriculum leaders generate an initial rank order of all students entered for each qualification. Use any recent data set available as a starting point, for example raw scores from January or December mock exams.
3. Departments use their usual internal moderation processes to moderate teacher assessments.
4. Teacher assessed grades are matched onto the initial rank. Any glaring differences are followed up and adjusted as necessary.
5. Departments hold meetings, in which every student name is read out and cases made for moving up or down the list.
6. Curriculum leaders or senior leaders use data such as previous results, transition matrices and national distribution data to 'sense check' the subject's results.
7. Final checks and adjustments are made, including adding any private candidates into the list.
8. Submission in the correct format for each exam board from 1 June.

Teacher assessment

Teachers should be continually reminded that they are being asked to use their professional judgement to determine the most likely grade a student would have achieved had they sat exams in the summer. This may not be the predicted grade they have already submitted, the student's own target grade, or their working-at grade or their last mock exam grade.

It's also not their deserved grade – ie what teachers think students deserve to get. It's the most likely grade. Inequalities exist. Some students perform better in terminal exams than others. You might not think the exam system is fit for purpose. That doesn't matter. You are using professional judgement to say what you think is the most likely outcome in the current system.

Use a range of evidence, and as much as possible. Teachers should work together, especially when students may have been taught by other staff in recent years.

As well as considering the grade, teachers should initially say how secure they think each student will be within that grade. This will help with the final rank order.

However, be very wary of any assessment done since schools closed in March. These assessments were unlikely to have been

done under controlled circumstances; and some students may have greater access to help and support than others. That's not to say lockdown assessment can't be used at all, but schools must think through the implications of this and avoid bias.

Curriculum leaders should offer particular support to less experienced staff, especially NQTs and RQTs who have experienced less exam cohorts. Use existing moderation processes that are in place.

Remind all staff that they must not, under any circumstances, reveal the teacher assessment or rank order to students or families. Doing so is exam malpractice.

Teachers know their students best. At the end of the day, using your professional judgement, knowledge of the student and knowledge of the course, what do you think that student would have got?

Ranking

Whereas teacher assessed grades may be moved up or down through national standardisation, a school's rank order of their students will not be changed. As such, it's arguable that the rank order is more important to get 'right' (remembering that no assessment is perfect) than the grade. It certainly shouldn't be left as an afterthought.

At the same time as teachers are making their grading judgements, curriculum leaders should formulate an initial list, perhaps using the most up to date data.

Remember all students, including early-entries (year 10 or lower), resitters and private candidates are included in one single rank order for each qualification. Also remember, you are not allowed to rank students equally – if the data suggests they are the same, you have to decide who is more confident, using teachers' knowledge.

Using the initial list, match the teacher assessed grades onto it. Does the rank order still make sense? Curriculum leaders should follow up any glaring errors – is the data the list came from wrong, or the teacher-assessed grade way out? Adjust as necessary.

An online meeting(s) should then be held to agree the final rank. Read each student's name one by one. Allow teachers to make the case for why they should be moved up or down the rank. Do this over several meetings if needed to avoid fatigue.

Curriculum leaders make the agreed adjustments and circulate the final rank order, along with the teacher assessed grades. They may want to consider national data sets, such as the school's previous results, transition matrices and the cohort's prior attainment, and national grade distributions as a sense check. It probably won't match perfectly, but does it look realistic?

Go through the list line by line as a department again, and agree the final order. Pay attention to students on the tops and bottoms of each grade, as these are the most likely to have their teacher assessed grade changed through standardisation. The final order will be submitted as a rank order within each grade, not the whole cohort.

Leading department meetings

In order to help the meetings where the rank order is discussed, the following tips might be helpful:

- Schedule several meetings, especially for large subjects, well in advance for this process to take place. Limit each meeting to 90 minutes or less to avoid fatigue.
- Establish ground rules and expectations. Ensure the NQT on your team is able to make the same arguments about their students as the senior leader.
- Go through each candidate in order. Don't skip ahead. The curriculum leader should read out each and every name. There needn't be a discussion about every student, but every student must be named.
- Accept that the list will never be perfect – no assessment practice is.
- As such, remind the whole team that they have to 'own' the final list. Even if they disagree with some of the rankings, provided they have the opportunity to make their case, they must accept the list collectively as a team. Even after the final results are published, the teacher assessment, rank order, and discussions must be treated as confidential, and not shared openly.

Other leadership considerations

Private candidates

Private candidates are any candidates you are entering as a centre or are not on roll as a student. Typically for a school, these will be returners who are resitting exams. You only enter students this summer if, as a headteacher, you are absolutely certain that your teachers have the same confidence in their assessed grades as their own exam classes. Schools are encouraged to seek additional evidence, such as assessment under controlled conditions, if needed to. If you are not confident of this, you should not enter the candidate. Remember, private candidates need to be included in your rank list, alongside your on-roll students.

Parents

This summer parents are naturally anxious about the process, and understand that teachers have a greater influence in their child's results than usually. This has already led to well-meaning but unhelpful interventions. As a leadership team, be clear with parents about the expectations you have as a school regarding contact with staff. Ensure that no teacher is threatened, intimidated or pressured by parents.

Confidentiality

It will be considered malpractice if either the teacher assessed grade or rank order of students is disclosed before results are published in August. After that date, this information should be kept confidential. However, under data regulation law, students may request a) their teacher assessed grade, b) their number in the rank, c) and emails, recordings, evidence, etc using their name or candidate number that helped reach these decisions. This can be requested through a formal freedom of information request. Leaders should be mindful of this during the process. Legally, any email about a student and their assessment must be given.

Integrity

Ultimately, this process is new for everyone. It's not perfect, but no assessment is. All leaders and teacher must act with the upmost integrity and professionalism, and ultimately put the need of students, and their progression, first. This is a difficult time for everyone, and leaders must support the mental and physical wellbeing of their staff, students and communities throughout this process.

ssat the schools, students
and teachers network

Central House, 142 Central Street, London, EC1V 8AR

Tel: 020 7802 2300 **Email:** info@ssatuk.co.uk **ssatuk.co.uk**

SSAT (The Schools Network) Ltd, a private company limited by shares.
Registered in England and Wales. Company number: 08073410. VAT number: GB 135 221 255.
Registered office: 5th Floor, Central House, 142 Central Street, London, EC1V 8AR.