



ALL Briefing No. 27

Date: January 2021

Theme: OFQUAL / DfE Consultation on how GCSE, AS and A-level grades should be awarded in Summer 2021

Background: The remit for this consultation emerged from letters on 13th January between the Secretary of State and OFQUAL. Consultation is open until Friday 29 January – respond via: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021>

The consultation contains 68 questions.

Key messages extracted from the document

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021/how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021-html>

*This Briefing consists of quotations – text inset is taken out of order but forms part of the original (which is much longer and more detailed.) So **we** refers to **OFQUAL/DfE**.*

Rationale

Given students' education has been disrupted by the pandemic, their interests will be best served if they engage fully with their education for the remainder of the academic year, if they are taught for as long as possible and if they cover as much of the curriculum as possible.

Proposals at a glance

We propose that in summer 2021 a student's grade ... will be based on their teachers' assessment of the standard at which the student is performing. In the absence of exams, teachers are best placed to assess the standard at which their student is performing. This consultation seeks views on our proposal, including how teachers should be supported to make their assessments fairly and consistently.

We propose that all students who do not believe their grade reflects the evidence of the standard at which they were performing can appeal.

And we propose that students who are not studying within a school or college ... must be able to be issued with a grade too. We are seeking views on the options that would

enable them to do so.

Overview of our proposals

... In the absence of exams, our view is that teachers, once provided with the necessary guidance and training, are best placed to assess the evidence of the standard at which their student is performing.

We propose that the final assessment will be made towards the end of the academic year, at about the time students would have taken their exams.

In summary we propose that:

- students would continue with their education during this academic year
- students would be assessed by their teachers in a period beginning in May into early June
- teachers would submit grades to the exam boards by mid-June
- external quality assurance by the exam boards would be ongoing throughout June
- results would be issued to students once the QA process is complete, most likely in early July
- student appeals could be submitted immediately following the issue of results and would first be considered by schools and college

... we propose that exam boards should provide guidance and training, and make available a set of papers, which teachers use with their students as part of their assessment.

We propose that the exam boards should use in their papers, questions that are similar in style and format to those in normal exam papers.

We propose that the set of papers provided by the exam boards should cover a reasonable proportion of the content and that teachers should also have some choice of the topics on which their students could answer questions.

We are seeking feedback on the minimum breadth of subject content a teacher must assess a student on. The exact approach would have to be tailored for each subject ... following this consultation.

This consultation seeks views on whether such papers should be provided and, if so, what form they should take ... when they should be made available, and whether their use should be mandated. We propose that, where it is part of the qualification's existing specification, teachers will continue to assess any non-exam assessment that a student has undertaken in a subject.

In GCSE English language qualifications students are assessed on their spoken language skills by their teachers and receive a grade that is separately reported alongside the main qualification grade. This is also the approach for GCSE modern foreign languages in 2021.

We propose that teachers should draw on a range of broader evidence of a student's work in making their final assessment.

We propose that teachers should be able to take other evidence of a student's performance into account when deciding on the grade to be submitted to the exam board.

If teachers do not use the exam board set papers, or even where they do, they should use additional ways to assess students and to gather evidence of the standard at which their students are performing. The exam boards would provide guidance on how they could do this.

We propose that where teachers devise their own assessment materials, they should be comparable in demand to the papers provided by the exam boards. Any assessment must allow students to demonstrate the standard at which they can perform.

We propose that the exam boards should provide guidance for each subject on the relative use of different forms of performance evidence.

We propose that other sources of performance evidence could include:

- formal tests
- mock examination results
- substantial candidate work

Feedback from students suggests they want to know whether their work informs the grade they receive before they do the work. The counter view is that some students would not want work they have done earlier in the course to be excluded from their teacher's assessment if it provided evidence to support a higher grade. We therefore think it is important to gather views on whether and, if so, to what extent, work done earlier in the year should be taken into account ...

We do not propose to ask teachers what grade a student might have received if they had been able to take their exams – which is what teachers were asked in 2020. The disruption to the 2021 cohort's education would make it more difficult for teachers to make such a judgement this year.

We propose grades this year should be based on teachers' assessments of the evidence of the standard at which their students are performing; it should indicate their

demonstrated knowledge, understanding and skills. ... Teachers should assess students on the areas of content they have covered and can demonstrate their ability, while ensuring sufficient breadth of content coverage so as not to limit progression.

We expect that students' performance will be assessed within their school or college – ... in line with public health guidance in place at the time. However ... if the pandemic makes it essential, where papers are to be used in the final assessment, the papers could be completed at an alternative venue, including a student's home, where that is an option.

If any evidence used to determine a final assessment was not completed under the supervision of a teacher (either directly or remotely), the student (and anyone supervising them) would be required to make an appropriate declaration that they had not received unauthorised assistance.

Impact on schools and colleges

We expect there would be one-off, direct costs and administrative burdens to schools and colleges associated with the following activities:

- familiarisation with information and guidance from exam boards on teacher assessment and submitted grades
- communication and training from senior leaders to teaching staff on teacher assessment and submitted grades
- marking and quality assurance of teacher assessments and submitted grades
- amendments to centre systems to enable the required information to be gathered and submitted to exam boards in a format specified by them
- managing high volumes of enquiries from candidates and parents
- managing potentially high volumes of appeals

Reference:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021/how-gcse-as-and-a-level-grades-should-be-awarded-in-summer-2021-html>

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