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Guidance

Guidance on collecting evidence of student performance to ensure resilience in the qualifications system

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Applies to England

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This guidance is for centres delivering GCSE, AS and A levels, Project Qualifications and the Advanced Extension Award in maths (AEA) to provide resilience in the exam system in the unlikely event that government determines that exams are not able to go ahead. The arrangements are not designed to be used to award grades in circumstances where there has been localised disruption to teaching and learning. It asks that schools and colleges ensure students sit mock exams in exam conditions before their formal exams, and that their papers are retained. One set of mocks for this purpose should be sufficient. By doing this, schools and colleges will ensure they have alternative evidence of student performance to enable alternative methods of awarding grades, such as Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs).

The scope of assessments

Centres should plan assessment opportunities to gather evidence of student performance in line with their usual assessment approaches, unless they conclude that there is any reason to vary them to make sure they have collected appropriate evidence. Evidence gathered should be sufficient that schools and colleges feel confident that, taken together, the evidence is an appropriate assessment of the knowledge, understanding and skills of the student.

Teachers should plan so that the evidence gathered for students assesses them on a wide range of content, similar to that which they will expect in their summer exams, and across the assessment objectives for the qualification. Students should normally only be assessed on content they have been taught so far, at the point in the year when their teachers would usually assess them. Teachers should plan both the assessment opportunities, and when they take place, in ways they judge will best support their students in preparing for their exams. Assessments should therefore normally take place in the final year of study.

Schools and colleges are encouraged to complete assessments in the first half of the academic year where possible to create greater resilience in the face of unforeseen events.

The total assessment time should not normally exceed the total time students would spend taking exams for the relevant qualification, plus any time spent on non-exam assessment. Teachers should guard against over-assessment and normally would not need to spend longer on these assessments than they would on their existing assessment arrangements. In the vast majority of cases, where schools and colleges follow their existing internal assessment arrangements, they will have sufficient evidence.

Centres should not look to introduce additional assessments for the purpose of gathering evidence of student performance, as this can be counter to supporting students as they prepare for their exams. Ideally students will benefit from the opportunities they are given to prepare for their exams, and certainly are not adversely affected by taking too many assessments. Providing mock exams are completed in line with this guidance, one set should be sufficient for the purposes of gathering evidence.

Centres might choose to carry out other assessments across the year that are not for the purpose of evidence collection.

The conditions under which students should be assessed

Teachers should assess their students to provide them with opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding in ways that cover the assessment objectives for the qualification.

Students taking GCSEs, AS and A levels, Project Qualifications and AEA should be assessed under exam-like conditions wherever possible. For example, students:

- should not know the questions in the assessment beforehand
- should work independently and without assistance (other than as required for a reasonable adjustment)
- should not have access to books or revision notes
- should be supervised during the assessment, though centres do not have to use external invigilation
- should be assessed under timed conditions equivalent to those under which they would expect to complete the assessment (or part of an assessment) during their exam

This will both help to ensure that the work is authentic and, given that this reflects the conditions under which formal exams would be taken, will prepare students for exams in the summer. This is also likely to align closely with existing assessment arrangements in many schools and colleges. Noting the need to minimise burden and the impact on resources, these controls could be provided within a classroom rather than exam hall setting.

Wherever possible, a centre should either assess all of its students who are taking a particular qualification using the same material at the same time or using different materials at different times. Where this is not possible,

centres should seek to ensure that students are not able to predict the materials they are going to be assessed on.

Reasonable adjustments must be made for disabled students, in accordance with equalities law, and as explained in this document.

The assessment materials

The assessments should be as useful as possible for students preparing to take summer exams. Assessments should, therefore, be similar to full or parts of the exam papers they are preparing to take next summer and should be based on exam board materials as far as possible. It is likely that this is in line with existing mock exam arrangements for most schools.

Student awareness

It should be made clear to students that it is expected that exams and formal assessments will go ahead as planned. Students should be made aware that any assessment evidence collected and retained under this guidance would be used to determine grades only in the unlikely situation that exams and formal assessment could not go ahead. Students should also be told, where possible, before taking any assessment, whether their performance in the assessment would be used as part of evidence to determine a grade for them if exams cannot go ahead as planned.

In exceptional circumstances, it might be necessary for assessments that were not taken in line with this guidance to be used as evidence to inform a grade should exams not go ahead as planned. This could be, for example, where a student misses the centre's planned assessments because of serious illness. In such cases the student might not have been told in advance of taking the assessment that their performance might be used as evidence. Guidance for schools and colleges on how to take this into account when determining TAGs would be provided on this if exams cannot proceed as expected.

Reasonable adjustments for disabled students

The same reasonable adjustments that will be made for disabled students taking exams in the summer should, where possible, be applied to the assessments. It is likely that, for many centres, this is in line with their normal mock exam arrangements. Records should be made of the adjustments and the reasons for them. The centre should record the reason why any reasonable adjustment was not made.

If a student's need for a reasonable adjustment is only identified after an assessment has taken place, their teacher should record the reason for this late identification and where possible allow the student to take a different, but equivalent, assessment with the reasonable adjustment in place.

Special consideration for students whose performance is affected by an event outside of their control

If a teacher is satisfied that a student's performance in one or more of the assessments was affected by an event that was outside of the student's control at the time of, or immediately before, the assessment, such as illness or family bereavement, the teacher should mark the assessment as normal but record the issues so that these could be taken into account when determining a grade, should that be necessary.

Centres should make sure students know they need to tell their teachers before, or immediately after, the assessment of any events outside of their control that might have affected their performance in an assessment.

Marking

Teachers should mark the assessments in line with published exam board mark schemes and guidance where appropriate. Centres should support teachers to mark work for the same qualification to the same standard.

As these arrangements are intended to support the existing internal assessment process, students should be given feedback, which could include marks or comments. Students should not, however, repeat assessments with the same questions following such feedback for the purpose of evidence collection.

Teachers may tell the student the grade at which their performance in the assessment indicates they have performed. As centres prepare students to

take their qualifications, including through mock exams, those papers taken in and before 2019 and from 2023 onwards will be most useful when considering the standard of work expected at each grade. This will also support teachers where the assessment undertaken also informs decisions on predicted grades, be that for use internally or for external use such as UCAS predictions.

Teachers should take into account that approaches to grading were exceptional in autumn 2020 and 2021 and summer 2022. There was greater leniency in grade boundaries that is not normally applied in exams. Schools and colleges should therefore ensure they do not consider grade boundaries from these years when providing an indicative grade for students.

Teachers should make it clear to their students that any grade used to indicate the level at which the student has performed is not an indication of what their final grade would be if it became necessary to award a qualification using the evidence.

It will not be possible for a teacher to determine a final qualification grade unless Ofqual sets specific guidance on this, which Ofqual will do only if exams do not go ahead.

Retention of the work

Student work, either the original or a copy, must always be retained by the centre. Student work can be retained digitally or physically. Students may be given copies, or the original work, where this would support their study.

Non-exam assessment

Where a GCSE, AS or A level includes non-exam assessment (NEA), such as a dance or music performance, teachers should support their students, wherever possible, to complete that assessment in line with the timescales set by exam boards. Should exams be cancelled, teachers would be expected to take a student's NEA into account when determining a TAG.

Project qualifications and GCSE, AS and A level art & design qualifications

Students taking Project and GCSE, AS and A level qualifications in certain subjects such as art and design do not take exams in any year. Teachers do not, therefore, need to carry out any additional assessment of students taking these qualifications in case exams cannot take place. They should support students, wherever possible, to complete their non-exam assessments in line with the timescales set by exam boards.

Private candidates

Private candidates are typically home educated or students who are retaking a qualification having left the school or college where they originally studied. They may be studying with a distance learning provider, tutor, parent, or without any such support.

In normal years, when exams take place, private candidates register with a centre which arranges for the candidate to take their exams alongside the centre's students. Centres are encouraged to continue to allow private candidates to register with them in the usual way.

Some private candidates might want centres to assess them during the academic year, alongside the centre's students, in line with this guidance. Centres may agree to do so, although they would need to make sure the assessments only covered content the private candidate had studied. Alternatively, private candidates could be assessed only in the unlikely event it is confirmed that exams will not take place as intended, in which case they would be assessed in a compressed period.

In the unlikely event that government did consider that exams could not take place in the future, the DfE would again explore ways to encourage centres to work with private candidates and to provide affordable opportunities for private candidates to work with centres.

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