

The following summary of the Ofqual consultation document on exams and assessment for Summer 2021 was published in Schools Week magazine on 19th January 2021.

You can read the full Ofqual/DfE proposals [here](#) and put your views across in the consultation [here](#).

The consultation closes on 29th January 2021.

The 2021 summer exams plan: everything you need to know

by Schools Week reporters

In short: the regulator is proposing grades for this year will be determined by teachers and, following “quality reassurance”, results will be issued by exam boards, who will “remain accountable for the results”. Exam boards will record the grades on certificates in the same way as in previous years.

1. Assessments to be done ‘late May/early June’

Ofqual wants pupils to “engage fully” in their education for the remainder of the year. So, the regulator is proposing teachers making final assessments of their students’ performance during late May and early June. Ofqual said any later than this would delay releasing grades. If it was earlier, there would be insufficient time for teachers to assess their students. Ofqual is also looking for views on whether work done earlier in the year should be taken into account.

2. Grades based on current performance – not what students would have achieved

Last year, teachers were asked to come up with a grade they thought a student would have achieved had they had set their exams. This has been ditched.

But, under the new plan, Ofqual wants the grade to 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,” the consultation added.

3. Exam boards providing papers for teachers to mark ...

Ofqual is proposing that exam boards could provide papers which would be marked by teachers to help inform their assessments.

The exam boards could then sample teachers’ marking for quality assurance and “seek to ensure this was comparable across different types of school and college”.

Ofqual suggests that the boards may use a combination of questions from past papers and new questions to “develop their papers”. Teachers should have some choice of the topics to “take account of content that has not been fully taught due to the disruption. In that scenario, multiple papers might be chosen to ensure sufficient coverage of what is assessed.”

Boards should also give guidance on how teachers should take into account other evidence and “factors that might have affected their performance in the papers”.

4. ... and coursework to be included

The regulator is proposing teachers take into account the standard of a student's non-exam assessment in their final grade. Ofqual says students should not be penalised if they have been unable to complete their non-exam assessment for "reasons beyond their control".

Where this has happened, teachers should take it into account when deciding on the weight they give to the paper and non-exam assessment.

"The exam boards could provide guidance on this, including on any changes to the conditions under which the assessments should be taken. The weighting used by the teacher would need to be recorded, to support the exam boards' quality assurance and any appeal by the student".

But while teachers should mark non-exam assessments, exam boards would not be required to moderate their marking.

5. Teachers can use their own papers, too

Regardless of whether a teacher decides to use the exam board papers for assessment, teachers should use other ways to assess students – which boards could provide guidance on.

If teachers devise their own assessment materials, they should be "comparable in demand" to the exam board papers and have mark schemes. Ofqual says other evidence could include formal tests, mocks and "substantial candidate work".

Greater weight should also be given to evidence of students' performance that is closer to the time of the final assessment.

6. Exams can be completed at home

Ofqual said it expects students' performance will be assessed within their school or college. If this is not possible due to the pandemic, papers could be completed "in an alternative venue, including a student's home".

But if any of the evidence used to determine a final assessment was not completed under a teacher's supervision (either directly or remotely), the student would be required to make an appropriate declaration they did not receive unauthorised assistance.

7. 'Menu' of exams so pupils don't know which one they are sitting

Exam papers should also be set within in a "set period of time". Without this, students who take papers later might be at an advantage, particularly if the content is leaked.

Ofqual says this could be reduced by exam boards creating a "menu of papers" for teachers to choose from. These could be deliberately published not long before the assessment window opened, although students "would not know which one(s) they would be required to complete".

Ofqual is also seeking views on how long this assessment period should be. After this consultation, it will ask for schools' opinion on which dates would work for each subject.

8. Exams boards to provide support on grading

It is proposed that exam boards should provide support materials and training to help teachers assess their students, including exemplars, information on other performance evidence that could be taken into account and best practice on avoiding bias and discrimination

The guidance would also likely cover how to consider the impact of events outside a student's control on their performance, such as illness or family bereavement.

9. School leaders to sign off on grades

Schools would be asked to put in place internal standardisation arrangements and a process for heads of department and school leaders to agree and sign off on grades submitted by teachers.

A key part of this would be a declaration by a school leader confirming exam boards' requirements have been met. Evidence used to inform grades would need to be retained by schools to support external quality assurance by exam boards and in case of appeals.

10. Exam boards to sample evidence

Exam boards would then quality assure the approach taken by each school, working together to ensure their approaches are consistent and don't impose "unnecessary burden" on schools.

It is also proposed that exam boards should sample evidence on which grades were based at subject-level.

Where exam boards find that schools had not used appropriate quality assurance arrangements or that their requirements had not been followed, they should not issue grades until they are satisfied there is evidence to support them.

They would then require school leaders to investigate and make "any necessary changes" to the grade before finally submitting to the board. This means grades would only change as a result of "human intervention".

11. Grades only changed if they're 'not legitimate'

Ofqual is proposing that teachers should not tell students their grades, but that once results are issued, students who believe their teacher has made an error should be able to appeal to their school on that basis.

Schools would then review the marking of papers provided by exam boards or schools, the marking of any non-exam assessments and other evidence used to arrive at the pupil's grade.

Appeals should be considered "by a competent person appointed by the school" who was not involved in the original assessment, for example another teacher at the school or a teacher from another setting.

If an error is found, the outcome of the teacher assessment could then be adjusted up or down, but should only be changed if the person undertaking the appeal found that the outcome was "not

legitimate – that the outcome could not have been arrived at by a person who was reasonably exercising their academic judgement”.

Ofqual is also proposing that students should also be able to appeal further to exam boards, but only once they had received the outcome of an appeal to their school.

These appeals would not be on the merits of the teacher assessment or the school’s appeal decision, but rather on the grounds that a school “had not acted in line with the exam board’s procedural requirements” either when assessing the student or considering an appeal.

If an exam board upheld an appeal, the school would be required to reconsider the grade it recommended for the student.

Exam boards “would decide whether to charge a separate fee for appeals made to them”.