

**OXFORD**

INTERNATIONAL  
AQA EXAMINATIONS

# INFORMATION FOR HEADS OF CENTRES, HEADS OF DEPARTMENT AND TEACHERS

ON THE SUBMISSION OF TEACHER ASSESSED  
GRADES, IN RELATION TO AWARDING  
QUALIFICATIONS IN MAY/JUNE 2021

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April 2021

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v1.0

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# Introduction

This information is based on the [OxfordAQA guidance of the determination of grades document](#) and is for use with OxfordAQA qualifications.

Since early 2020, students' education has been disrupted by the closure of schools, and there is ongoing potential for self-isolation and further closures. On 28 January 2021, OxfordAQA announced, in the context of GCSE and A-level exam cancellations in England, that [exams in May/June 2021 could not go ahead as planned](#).

For May/June 2021, OxfordAQA will ask schools to generate, for each subject, assessed grades for their students. These grades should be based on a range of evidence completed as part of the course, including evidence produced in the coming months, which demonstrates the student's performance on the subject content they have been taught. The OxfordAQA process for May/June 2021 broadly follows a similar framework to the system being used by exam boards in England for GCSEs and A-levels.

This document provides information for Heads of Centres, Heads of Department, subject leads and teachers about how to generate these grades and the evidence that should be considered. OxfordAQA will provide a package of support materials to help teachers make these judgements and will provide further advice on how schools should collect and submit evidence.

The grades submitted to OxfordAQA must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the student's performance across a range of evidence, on the curriculum content that they have been taught (or, for private candidates who undertook self-study, the content that they have studied). Heads of centres should emphasise the need for judgements to be objective and fair – see separate [information for schools about making objective judgements](#).

Schools should be careful to avoid teachers being put under pressure from students, parents or carers to submit grades that are higher than the evidence supports. Head of centres should keep records of such cases and might be required to report to OxfordAQA any cases where they believe inappropriate pressure is being put on teachers. OxfordAQA may treat such cases as potential malpractice.

## Standards in 2021

For every subject, OxfordAQA requires each school to submit a grade for each student, based on a range of evidence which demonstrates the standard at which they are performing.

Schools should consider the standard at which each student has performed over the course of study. This judgement should be based on the evidence of a student's performance on the subject content which they have been taught, whether in the classroom or via remote learning. The evidence could include work which has already been completed during the course as well as that which will be completed in the weeks and months to come. It is important that the judgements are objective and based on the evidence produced by a student on the content they have been taught.

In coming to this judgement, schools should seek to make it no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years. This is the same advice that was given to schools in summer 2020 – the expected performance standard for a grade has not changed. However, for 2021, schools should bear in mind that students might not have been taught all the content and so might not demonstrate such a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding.

As part of their overall quality assurance, schools should consider the grades for this year's cohort compared to cohorts from recent years when exams have taken place at qualification level – for all GCSE subjects or all A-level subjects combined (where possible). At qualification level, this historical data can provide a useful guide to the expected profile of results and enables schools to check that they have not been overly harsh or lenient in their assessment of the 2021 cohort compared to previous years in which exams took place. Where schools have taken on private candidates, they should be excluded from such comparisons.

Where the overall results at GCSE or A-level look very different from recent years schools should record the likely reasons for this, as OxfordAQA might ask to see this as part of the external quality assurance process. OxfordAQA will target its quality assurance based on a number of factors, including where a school's results are considerably lower or higher than recent years.

## Sources of evidence

Schools should continue teaching students for as long as possible, to cover as much of the specification content as possible, and they should assess students on as broad a range of specification content as they can. In some cases, individual students might have missed substantially more teaching than their peers, and are therefore unable to produce sufficient evidence to support a grade.

Heads of centres will be required to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to provide the basis for a grade.

Evidence should relate to the specification content and should reflect, as far as possible, the sorts of questions and tasks that students would normally undertake in preparation for the qualification. Questions and tasks should be appropriately accessible for lower ability students and appropriately demanding to allow higher ability students to demonstrate performance to support higher grades. Questions and tasks should also be accessible for students with special educational needs or disabilities.

Schools should make students aware of the sources of evidence that will form the basis of the grades submitted, although students should not be told the final grade that is submitted to OxfordAQA. As far as possible, the sources of evidence should be consistent across a class or cohort of students, and schools should record the reasons for their selection. The school will make the final judgement about what is to be included and will need to document the rationale for any instances where consistent evidence is not used for a whole class or cohort.

Schools will be asked to make a holistic judgement of each student's performance on a range of evidence relating to the qualification's specification content that they have been taught (either in the classroom or via remote learning). Teachers can use evidence of a

student's performance from any point during the course of study, provided they are confident that it reflects the student's own work.

In coming to these holistic judgements, teachers will use their professional judgement to balance the full range of evidence available for each student against the performance standard set out in the grade descriptors and exemplification material, in line with the school's internal quality assurance process.

Schools should aim to base their judgments on high quality evidence that clearly relates to the specification, in terms of both content and assessment. OxfordAQA may sample some of this evidence as part of its quality assurance, and if it is not satisfied, may ask a school to reconsider its grades for a subject.

Where student work completed before this guidance was published is no longer available, appropriate records should be included instead. For example, where mock exam scripts were returned to students for feedback, a copy of the mock exam paper and the grade boundaries used should be included alongside a record of the mark a student achieved. Any work produced by students after this guidance was published should be retained by the school if it is to be used as part of the evidence to support the grade.

## Types of assessment evidence

We recommend the following types of evidence, where available:

1. Student work produced in response to assessment materials normally provided by OxfordAQA including past papers, and the groups of questions being provided to support evidence gathering this summer, or similar materials such as practice or sample papers.
2. Non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework), even if this has not been fully completed.
3. Student work produced in school-devised tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as exam board materials and have been marked in a way that reflects exam board mark schemes. This can include substantial class or homework (including those that took place during remote learning), internal tests taken by pupils and mock exams taken over the course of study.
4. Records of each student's standard of work over the course of study.

Schools should bear in mind the following factors in deciding how to balance different sources of evidence.

## When the evidence was produced

More recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance, although there may be exceptions, for example where a student has experienced significant ill health since the earlier assessments.

## What students were asked to do

Schools should aim to use consistent sources of evidence for a class or cohort that relate closely to the specification requirements. The rationale for any exceptions should be documented. Some tiered GCSEs specify content for extension tier students only, and in all qualifications, schools will need to provide accessible questions/tasks for lower attaining

students and appropriately demanding questions/tasks for higher attaining students to support higher grades.

## How the evidence was produced

Schools should be confident that work produced is the student's own and that the student has not been given inappropriate levels of support to complete it, either in the school, at home or with an external tutor. OxfordAQA will investigate instances where it appears that evidence is not authentic.

## Other considerations

The range and amount of evidence could vary between subjects. Schools will need to be flexible where some students have missed particular assessments, through no fault of their own, and may substitute other evidence if available.

Where a student is registered at 2 different schools, or has moved school part-way through the course of study, relevant evidence from both schools could be considered. It is the responsibility of the school making the exam entry to obtain any necessary evidence from other schools, including details of what was taught.

Where a student has worked with a specialist teacher or education professional, the school should seek information from them as appropriate when considering the available evidence for a student and in coming to their grading judgement. This might include, for example, seeking information from qualified teachers of deaf or visually impaired learners, or teachers of learners who have English as a second language or virtual school teams working with looked after children studying at the school. Schools with private candidates should also refer to the [detailed guidance from OxfordAQA](#). While discussions with teachers and other professionals should take place before the teacher assessed grade is decided by the school, those final judgements should be kept confidential within the school.

OxfordAQA will not prescribe the evidence that schools must use. Teachers can draw on existing records and available evidence from any point in the course. Schools should make sure that students are aware of the evidence that will form the basis of their final grade.

Schools should bear in mind the following when making judgements.

1. Expected tier of entry in tiered GCSE subjects – teacher assessed grades must reflect the tier of entry (9 to 3 or 9-9 to 3-3 for extension tier; 5 to 1 or 5-5 to 1-1 for core tier, as well as U).
2. Authentic evidence from other schools or established educational providers where a student might have studied during the course or such evidence from where a student has studied with the support of a specialist teacher or tutor. OxfordAQA will provide further guidance to support schools in how they can determine whether evidence is likely to be authentic, including where they may normally rely on evidence that has been produced with certain types of provider without the need for detailed checks.

Students should, wherever possible, continue with their NEA as it covers key areas of the specification. Performance on NEA, even if not complete, should be balanced with other evidence of the student's performance. Schools should bear in mind that many students normally achieve a higher grade on their NEA than in their exams, which should be considered when coming to the overall judgement.

Reasonable adjustments for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place when evidence was generated. Where they were not, schools should take that into account when coming to their judgement. Where appropriate, this should include input from the specialist teachers and other professionals. Schools should note that they are not permitted to charge students for putting in place reasonable adjustments.

Since students are not taking exams this year, the usual special consideration arrangements will not apply. However, where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, schools should take that into account when making their judgements. The [OxfordAQA guide to special consideration](#) outlines the sorts of personal circumstances that should be taken into account.

For GCSE English Language, OxfordAQA will also collect grades for the separate endorsement. There will be no requirement to collect evidence for this assessment and these grades will not be subject to OxfordAQA quality assurance or be part of the appeals process. Schools should submit these grades, alongside the qualification grades, by Friday 18 June 2021.

## Private candidates

Private candidates should be assessed in a similar way to other students, using a range of evidence. This could include taking the OxfordAQA provided assessment materials in a suitable form or could use other sources of evidence. Private candidates should have the same opportunity as other students to be assessed on what they have learnt, but schools will need to bear in mind the particular circumstances of the candidates in the approach they take to determining grades, including the fact that the school often will not already have evidence on which to base a judgement. Where a school accepts private candidates, OxfordAQA will expect schools to provide to private candidates a description of the main elements of their approach to assessment before they register with the school.

This is likely to mean that schools decide to use the full range of available flexibility in how grades are determined for private candidates to, for example:

- draw on evidence from other educational institutions in line with the point above
- conduct assessments remotely if necessary
- set new school-devised assessments that reflect what the student has been taught and the specification
- rely more heavily on the OxfordAQA provided assessment materials
- exceptionally, conduct recorded oral assessments with the students where insufficient other evidence is available or could be produced

OxfordAQA will also provide guidance on potential combinations of evidence that could be used for a specific subject. In all cases, the head of centre will make sure they have collected sufficient evidence to ensure that they are able to confirm that the grades are a true representation of student performance. OxfordAQA will produce further guidance to assist those schools that may wish to determine grades for private candidates.

## Submitting data

OxfordAQA will contact schools in due course with further instructions about how to submit the data. Schools will be able to submit grades from 26 May, and the final deadline for submission of data, including grades for the endorsements, is Friday 18 June 2021. Schools

will not need to send any supporting evidence, such as student work, to OxfordAQA unless requested to do so, but schools should retain the work and the records of the marking and grading judgements. This may be subject to scrutiny during quality assurance checks, and it will be required in cases where a student wishes to appeal their result.

## Internal sign-off within the school

### Department sign-off

Each grade for a subject must be signed off by at least 2 teachers in that subject, one of whom should be the head of department or subject lead. Where there is only one teacher in the subject or department, or only one is available, the head of centre should be the second signatory. Where a staff member might have a personal interest in a candidate (for example as a relative), heads of centres should make sure that additional controls are put in place, as appropriate.

### Head of Centre sign-off

The head of centre is required to confirm that the grades are a true representation of student performance. If the head of centre is unavailable to do this, it may be delegated to a deputy. The head of centre will be required to submit a declaration when the data is submitted, which will include the following points.

I confirm that:

- these grades have been checked for accuracy, reviewed by a second member of staff and are accurate and represent the professional judgements made by my staff
- entries were appropriate for each candidate in that students entered were those already studying the course, and each candidate has no more than one entry per subject
- my school has met the requirements set out by OxfordAQA for internal quality assurance
- I am satisfied that each student's grade is based on an appropriately broad range of evidence, including evidence from other schools, providers or specialist teachers if relevant, and is their own work
- each student has been taught (or, in the case of private candidates, has studied) an appropriate amount of content to provide the basis for a grade
- OxfordAQA requirements have been met for any private candidates
- access arrangements and reasonable adjustments were provided with appropriate input from the relevant specialists (and where they were not, that has been taken into account)
- I and my staff have taken note of the OxfordAQA guidance on making objective judgements, judgements have not been influenced by pressure from students, parents or carers, and I am confident that the judgements are fair
- all relevant student evidence and records are available for inspection, as necessary





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