

OXFORD

INTERNATIONAL
AQA EXAMINATIONS

GUIDANCE ON THE DETERMINATION OF GRADES

FOR AS AND A-LEVELS AND GCSES FOR
MAY/JUNE 2021

April 2021

V1.0

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Introduction

On 28 January 2021, OxfordAQA announced that it was [no longer fair](#) for the May/June 2021 examination series for GCSE and AS/A-level qualifications to go ahead due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. OxfordAQA has been working to prepare guidance and information to support the provision of grades to students this May/June by schools.

In developing this guidance, we have:

- used [existing JCQ guidance](#) released to schools entering for qualifications in England;
- taken into consideration the needs of schools and teachers;
- ensured compliance with OxfordAQA regulations and requirements; and
- tried to minimise the administrative burden for schools.

This guidance provides:

- information in respect of the process, from the creation and submission of a Centre Policy, through to the determination of grades,
- requirements for internal quality assurance procedures,
- submission of grades to OxfordAQA,
- the external quality assurance process,
- the issue of results and the appeals process for students.

If necessary, and dependent upon questions raised by schools, this document may be updated. Such updates will be clearly marked and widely communicated. This would be to clarify guidance if required, rather than change the guidance itself.

Some of this content requires actions. There is also supporting advice, information and templates to make the submission of a Centre Policy straightforward. While some forms and templates are optional, if not used, a similar approach to record keeping is required.

OxfordAQA will issue additional guidance, including support materials at a subject level and information about the submission of grades. OxfordAQA will also be publishing the detailed guidance for appeals early in May/June.

We fully recognise the challenge of determining grades for students this year and we hope this guidance, the supporting templates and proformas will ease the administrative burden and ensure students, their parents, and all those who use the grades awarded can have confidence that they have been determined as fairly and objectively as possible. So everyone at OxfordAQA would like to thank teachers, heads of schools, exam officers and colleagues across schools for everything you are doing to ensure your students receive the grades they deserve.

Scope of guidance

The scope of this guidance applies to all OxfordAQA schools offering the following qualifications regulated by OxfordAQA:

- International AS and A-levels (including IPQ)
- International GCSEs (including GCSE Plus)

Other essential documentation

While this guidance sets out the processes, information and support available to schools from OxfordAQA, colleagues in schools must also read and consider the following OxfordAQA regulations including: [Guidance: Information for heads of schools, heads of department and teachers on the submission of assessed grades: May/June 2021](#), and [Guidance: Information for schools about making objective judgements](#)

These additional documents provide information about how to determine grades, the evidence that should be considered in doing so, and objectivity in grading judgements. Both documents must be read alongside this guidance and the arrangements put in place for determining students' grades at each school must be consistent with the expectations in them.

Terminology

Terminology

For clarity, the terminology used in this guidance document has been standardised. The terminology used is as follows:

Additional assessment materials: qualification-specific sets of questions covering key knowledge, understanding and skills, provided with mark schemes and mapping grids.

Schools/Centres: these are OxfordAQA approved schools.

Centre Policy: the policy sets out the processes schools will follow for determining grades, in an appropriate, consistent and fair way – only one will need to be submitted for all OxfordAQA qualifications.

Private Candidates: are students who have not studied with the school that makes their entry.

Students: this means students entered for qualifications in May/June 2021 within the scope of this guidance as outlined above and encompasses 'candidates' and 'students'.

Support materials: to assist in the determination and submission of grades, for example guidance, training, exemplar responses, performance data and grade descriptors.

What will OxfordAQA do?

OxfordAQA will provide schools with a package of support materials to assist in the determination and submission of grades. This will include questions, mark schemes, exemplar materials and grade descriptors. We will also provide you with information about how to contact us if you have any questions or need further support.

OxfordAQA will, in addition to the guidance on Centre Policies in this document, provide a template and guidance on how to submit them. Following submission and as part of our quality assurance processes this summer, OxfordAQA will review all Centre Policies.

Following the positive feedback from our quality assurance support calls last summer, OxfordAQA will arrange a virtual visit (via Zoom or an alternative) with all schools to discuss their Centre Policy and to provide further support and guidance where necessary. These virtual visits will also help to ensure that the grades awarded across schools are comparable.

OxfordAQA may have further contact with centres if, following any quality assurance activity, there are concerns in relation to the assessed grades submitted.

OxfordAQA is responsible for determining final grades and awarding qualifications and will also manage the second stage of appeals.

What will schools do?

Schools will create and submit a Centre Policy – [a pre-populated template option is available here](#). This will:

- outline the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the school;
- detail what training and support will be provided to school staff involved with the process, including any training around bias and objectivity in assessment and grading decisions;
- confirm the approach to be taken when determining assessed grades, including consideration of evidence and how that evidence informs students' grades;
- detail the internal quality assurance processes that are in place;
- detail any provision for Private Candidates, if applicable.

Schools will collaborate with OxfordAQA if any concerns are raised following the submission of a Centre Policy. This will include participating in a virtual visit.

Schools will review grades determined by teachers in line with the Centre Policy.

Schools must ensure that students are aware of the evidence used to determine their grade. Although teachers may share results associated with individual pieces of evidence, they must not share with students the grades submitted to OxfordAQA before results are released.

Schools must submit assessed grades to OxfordAQA with a Head of Centre Declaration that confirms that the school complied with its Centre Policy. Guidance on how to submit these documents will be provided by OxfordAQA along with information on grade submission.

Schools will collaborate with OxfordAQA where any additional external quality assurance is required as a result of concerns in relation to the assessed grades submitted, which will include participating in a second virtual visit.

Schools will release results to students for qualifications as required on 10 August for AS/A-levels and 12 August for GCSE.

Schools will, on request, conduct the first stage of the appeals process, to check if an administrative or procedural error has occurred. Schools will also be required to submit second stage appeals to OxfordAQA on a student's behalf, if the student continues to believe that an error persists or the grade awarded was an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement. Full details on the appeals process are provided in the appeals section of this document.

Timelines and key dates

The overall process for awarding in 2021 is illustrated on the next page. The key dates to be aware of are:

22 March to 22 April	Entry amendments window open for schools
31 March	Additional Assessment Materials (sets of questions, mark schemes and mapping) and grade descriptors
12 April	Additional support materials (answers with examiner commentaries)
12 April to 30 April	Window for Centre Policy submission
19 April	Additional support materials (grading exemplification)
19 April to 11 June	OxfordAQA reviews Centre Policies and conduct virtual visits
26 April	Entry deadline for Private Candidates
26 May to 18 June	Window for Assessed Grades submission opens
18 June to 16 July	OxfordAQA conducts further reviews of evidence where needed (<i>* in exceptional circumstances, sample checks may take place until 23 July</i>)
10 August	International AS/A-level results day
12 August	International GCSE results day
10 August to 7 September	Priority appeals window
10 August to 16 August	Priority appeals: student requests school review
10 August to 20 August	Priority appeals: school conducts review
11 August to 23 August	Priority appeals: school submits appeal to OxfordAQA on behalf of the student
10 August to end October	Majority of non-priority appeals take place
10 August to 3 September	Non-priority appeals: student requests school review
10 August to 10 September	Non-priority appeals: school conducts review
11 August to 17 September	Non-priority appeals: school submits appeal to OxfordAQA

The Quality Assurance Process

The quality assurance process will support schools to construct appropriate processes to underpin the determination of grades. There are internal and external elements to the process.

The starting point of the process is the Centre Policy. This sets out the processes schools will follow for determining grades, in an appropriate, consistent and fair way. The policy should reference all of the relevant external advice and guidance provided by OxfordAQA. An exemplar of a Centre Policy [can be found here](#), and schools can adopt and adapt this document. Each Head of Centre will then need to produce a summary of the policy which will be submitted to OxfordAQA for review. The Centre Policy Summary Form [can be found here](#).

Internal quality assurance process

Every school must produce a Centre Policy; this can simply be done by choosing to adopt or adapt the pre-populated template. If schools have entries with OxfordAQA and AQA, they only need to produce one full Centre Policy document and complete one Centre Policy Summary Form, which can be used for both boards. The Centre Policy Summary Form and the full Centre Policy must be uploaded to Sharefile by 23 April 2021. OxfordAQA will contact centres that haven't returned these documents by 30 April 2021, or if there is missing/incomplete information.

The Centre Policy will:

- Outline the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the school
- Detail the training and support provided for newly qualified teachers and training around objectivity in decision making
- Set out the approach for the determination of grades including how evidence will be used
- Describe the process that will be adopted where a potential conflict of interest has been identified, such as where a teacher's relative is a student
- Outline the internal quality assurance processes in place including arrangements to standardise judgements and consider assessed grades against results from previous years when exams have taken place (2017 to 2019)
- Detail any provision for Private Candidates, if applicable.

Exams officers will be provided with further details regarding submission of the policy summary.

External quality assurance process

STAGE 1 – Pre-assessed grade submission

Following submission, OxfordAQA will carry out a review of all Centre Policy Summary Forms. This is to ensure the arrangements each school has in place are appropriate.

All centres will receive email confirmation that their Centre Policy has been received. Schools do not need to wait for approval before beginning their grading processes. OxfordAQA will then contact all schools to arrange a virtual visit which will take place in May/June.

STAGE 2 – Pre-assessed grade submission

Virtual centre visits will support you to provide valid assessed grades and to ensure the best possible processes are in place. They are likely to be held via Zoom, and details will be confirmed at a later date. OxfordAQA will work with you if the use of this platform is not suitable.

Visits will be attended by trained representatives from OxfordAQA and senior leaders at schools. We will work with you to find a suitable time and date. Visits will take the form of a professional conversation and will focus on the process of providing assessed grades.

If OxfordAQA has concerns about a Centre Policy, the school may be asked, having received guidance from OxfordAQA, to provide an updated version of their Centre Policy for review.

STAGE 3 – Post-assessed grade submission

In rare cases, where it is not possible to resolve issues arising from a virtual visit in Stage 2, schools may be asked to provide a sample or all of the evidence they've used as the basis of their students' assessed grades to OxfordAQA, so that it can be reviewed. This will involve a review of evidence at qualification and subject level by subject specialists.

It will also confirm that schools have implemented what was in their submitted Centre Policy and that their submitted grades reflect this. This process will provide confidence in the grades awarded by OxfordAQA.

This will take place following the submission of assessed grades and will be informed by:

- the outcomes of Stage 1 or 2 where OxfordAQA had concerns about their Centre Policy
- Stage 2 policy review checks, where a centre's overall results profile for this year's cohort appears to differ significantly compared to the profiles for cohorts from previous years when exams have taken place.

It will help ensure that school policies for determination of grades were followed, without placing an unreasonable administrative burden on the school. OxfordAQA will decide

whether to accept the grades submitted by a school or undertake a further review. This may lead to the withholding of results.

Schools are expected to work with the OxfordAQA at all stages of the quality assurance process. Failure to engage may put the timely issue of results to students at risk, and may lead to OxfordAQA undertaking further investigation (see [Malpractice section](#)).

CENTRE POLICY GUIDANCE

Creating the Centre Policy

The first step in the process is for schools to produce a Centre Policy. The policy must provide a summary of a school's approach to assessment and quality assuring the school determined grades they award to students, based on the evidence they have produced.

Many schools will have a range of documents outlining their approach to ensuring valid and reliable assessment outcomes for their students, in a standard exam series. For the purpose of the May/June 2021 series, OxfordAQA will require schools to provide a succinct overview of the approach they will take to assessments and quality assurance of grading decisions, by submitting a high-level policy which must contain, as a minimum, the information outlined below.

Schools will initially only be required to provide their Centre Policy. They will not be required to provide other documented procedures, but must reference them in their Centre Policy where they apply. OxfordAQA may ask to review referenced documentation as part of the quality assurance process. Schools must ensure they keep all relevant documentation.

OxfordAQA will require each school to complete a Summary of Centre Policy Form so that it can be reviewed to ensure that all required areas are addressed. A copy of the Summary of Centre Policy Form [can be found here](#) and Centre Policy template [can be found here](#).

Summary of the Centre Policy

For every school, the Head of Centre is required to complete the Summary of Centre Policy form and to submit the Centre Policy. Submission of the Centre Policy must be completed by 30 April 2021.

A review of the Centre Policy Summary will be completed by OxfordAQA to ensure that the arrangements each school has in place are appropriate.

All schools will receive confirmation that the Centre Policy has been received.

OxfordAQA will contact all schools to arrange a Virtual School Visit to clarify points in the Centre Policy.

Senior leaders should use the sample content and template included in the [Additional Materials section](#), alongside the following guidance to develop a Centre Policy that is fit for purpose for their school. The final content will reflect the school's actual practices. Sample content is provided in the Centre Policy Template and schools can amend the sample content as appropriate.

Content of the Centre Policy

It is recommended that the Centre Policy contains the following sections:

Statement of intent

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the purpose of the document, as appropriate to your school.

It is the responsibility of everyone involved in the determination of assessed grades to read, understand and implement the Centre Policy. On behalf of the school as a whole, the Head of Centre must confirm compliance with the policy through the submission of the Head of Centre Declaration. Staff must also familiarise themselves with this document and applicable OxfordAQA guidance in relation to May/June 2021.

Roles and responsibilities

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the personnel in your school who have specific roles and responsibilities in the process of determining assessed grades this year. For example, you should consider the responsibilities of the following:

- Head of Centre
- Senior Leadership Team and heads of department
- Teachers / Specialist Teachers / Special Educational Needs Coordinators
- Examinations Officer.

Training, support and guidance

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the training, support and guidance that your school will provide to those determining assessed grades this year.

Teachers involved in determining grades should be provided with school-based training to help achieve consistency and fairness to all students. Teachers should engage fully with all training and support that has been provided by OxfordAQA.

Additional support and, where appropriate, quality assurance measures should be provided by the head of department for teachers with less experience or single person departments. This will be agreed on a case-by-case basis but may include, for example, Senior Leaders or the Head of Centre validating the outcomes after comparing with outcomes in associated subject areas where applicable. In the case of small subject departments, heads of department may choose to collaborate with neighbouring schools for additional support.

The use of appropriate evidence

This section of the Centre Policy should set out how much regard will be given to the OxfordAQA guidance to teachers on grading.

We have produced guidance on recommended evidence which [can be found here](#).

Determining assessed grades

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the approach the school will take to awarding assessed grades.

Full details of how assessed grades should be awarded is provided in the guidance on [grading for teacher's section](#).

Internal and external quality assurance

These sections of the Centre Policy should outline:

- the approach the school will take to ensure internal standardisation of assessed grades, to ensure consistency, fairness and objectivity of decisions; and
- the arrangements in place to comply with OxfordAQA's arrangements for external quality assurance of school-determined grades in a timely and effective way.

Full details of how internal quality assurance should be applied is provided in [the Internal quality assurance process section](#). Further details of the requirements for external quality assurance are provided in the [External quality assurance process section](#).

Comparison of grades to results for previous cohorts

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the approach the school will take to describe how results from previous cohorts will be used to draw comparisons with assessed grades in 2021.

After the grading judgements have been made, schools should compare the grades for this year's cohort to cohorts from previous years when exams have taken place (2017 to 2019).

Regard should be given to the section [using data in this guide](#), about how to compare grades to previous years' distributions, the level of expected variability of outcomes over

time, and relevant limitations of such comparisons, including where schools are small or entries in a subject are small, for instance.

Where there is significant divergence from the qualification-level, ie AS / A-level and GCSE profiles attained in previous examined years, Heads of Centre should prepare a succinct commentary which addresses this disparity and highlights the reasons for it. This commentary will need to be available for subsequent review.

Access Arrangements and Special Consideration

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the approach the school will take to provide students with appropriate access arrangements and applying special consideration in particular instances.

Further guidance relating to Access Arrangements and Special Consideration can be found in the section [Reasonable adjustments, access arrangements and special consideration](#).

Addressing disruption

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the approach for addressing disruption experienced by students within the school. Grades will be based on teachers' assessments of the standard at which students are performing and will be based on the student's demonstrated knowledge and skills. It is important to remember that students do not have to have completed a mandated amount of content or demonstrate skills, knowledge and understanding across every area of the specification as they would normally.

Teachers will grade each student on their performance in the subject content they have been taught and will base their assessment on the student's demonstrated knowledge and skills.

While there is no set requirement for the minimum amount of content that students must have been taught, Heads of Centre will be required to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to form the basis for a grade.

If the content for any of the pieces of evidence have not been taught, then the teacher should remove that piece of evidence entirely or remove the questions that assess that specific content. If teachers need to remove any evidence at this point, they should consider whether they need to and can replace it with anything else.

Objectivity

In this section of the policy, schools should outline the arrangements in place to ensure objectivity of decisions.

Each assessed grade should be a holistic professional judgement, balancing different sources of evidence and data. It is important that the school's grading judgements are objective; they should only take account of existing records and available evidence of a student's knowledge, skills and abilities in relation to the subject.

OxfordAQA has published [Information for schools about making objective judgements](#). In writing this section of the Centre Policy, schools must refer to this guidance.

Recording decisions and retention of evidence and data

In this section of the policy, schools should outline the arrangements in place to record decisions, retain evidence and data.

Information about the retention of evidence can be found in the section below on [retention of evidence](#).

Further guidance on the use of data can be found in the section on [using data to support the grading process](#).

Authenticating evidence

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the school's approach to authenticating student evidence and ensuring that work used in support of the teacher assessed grade is the student's own.

Robust mechanisms should be in place to ensure that teachers are confident that work used as evidence is the students' own and that no inappropriate levels of support have been given to students to complete it, either within the school or with external tutors.

OxfordAQA will investigate instances where it appears evidence is not authentic.

Confidentiality, Malpractice and Maladministration, and conflicts of interest

These sections of the Centre Policy should outline:

- the measures in place to ensure confidentiality of the grades determined by the school and to make students aware of the range of evidence on which those grades will be based;
- the measures in place to prevent malpractice and other breaches of exam regulations, and to deal with such cases when they occur; and
- the measures in place to address potential conflicts of interest.

Private Candidates

This section of the Centre Policy should outline the school's approach to working with Private Candidates to arrive at appropriate grades.

Further guidance on Private Candidates can be found on the [OxfordAQA website](#).

Results

This section of the Centre Policy should outline your approach to the receipt and issue of results to students and the provision of necessary advice and guidance.

Further guidance on Results can be found in the section on [Results](#).

Appeals

This section of the Centre Policy should outline your approach to Appeals, to ensure that they are handled swiftly and effectively, and in line with OxfordAQA requirements.

The [guidance on appeals](#) provides an overview of the grounds and stages of the appeals process.

GUIDANCE ON GRADING FOR TEACHERS

Heads of Centres should ensure that students have the opportunity to show the full breadth of their knowledge and understanding in each subject based on what they have been taught. It is important that grades represent a holistic, objective judgement based on evidence of each student's performance in each subject. Evidence should be used consistently across the class or cohort wherever possible. The evidence can be of different types and can come from across the course of study. This guidance should support the consideration of the different factors that need to be accounted for when making a judgement about the grade.

Schools should also refer to OxfordAQA's guidance, [Information for schools about making objective judgements](#). Teachers are expected to have reviewed the grade descriptors and exemplification materials provided by OxfordAQA before grading students.

The following steps may be helpful when making grading decisions.

Stage 1: Consider what has been taught

Look at the specification that has been taught to consider:

- what content has been taught?
- what content has not been taught to this cohort because of the impact of the pandemic?
- has the content that has been taught been covered deeply or superficially?

The evidence used to make judgements must only include the appropriate assessment of content that has been taught.

Stage 2: Collect the evidence

Consider what evidence there is of student performance, potentially collected over the course of study, 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. OxfordAQA's guidance on recommended evidence, [Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of assessed grades: May/June 2021](#), includes:

- Student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by OxfordAQA, including groups of questions, past papers or similar materials such as practice or sample papers.
- Non-exam assessment (NEA) work (often referred to as coursework), even if this has not been fully completed.

- student work produced in school-set tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as OxfordAQA materials and have been marked in a way that reflects OxfordAQA mark schemes. This can include:
 - substantial class or homework¹ (including work that took place during remote learning);
 - internal tests taken by students; and/or
 - mock exams taken over the course of study.
 - records of each student's standard of work over the course of study.

In some limited circumstances, where other evidence is not available or possible to create, an oral assessment may be an appropriate form of evidence. This form of assessment may be needed, for example, where a candidate has little available evidence, is unable to attend an assessment in person and it is not possible to arrange a remote written assessment. If this is used, the assessment should be recorded (in English) so that it can be referred to later during internal and external quality assurance and, where necessary, the school review and appeals process. The focus of the assessment should be to assess the student's knowledge and skills as required by the specification.

Further guidance on completing NEA and assessing incomplete NEA and use of alternative evidence is [available here](#).

Assessments used might be produced by OxfordAQA, third parties or they might be teacher-set tasks.

It is not necessary for every aspect of the specification to be assessed to arrive at a grade. The aim is to include evidence that assesses the student's ability across a reasonable range of subject content reflecting, where possible, all assessment objectives, as set out in qualification specifications. Consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support the judgement that is being made. If not, what additional assessment might be needed? Could the assessment materials provided by OxfordAQA be used to supplement or help to confirm performance of previous assessments?

Ideally, the evidence used will be consistent across the class or cohort but that may not always be the case if a student has missed some teaching, or one or more assessments, for valid reasons. All students will have had slightly different learning experiences (for example, missing lessons). For most students, consistency in the use of evidence is expected, and a differentiated approach is not warranted. In cases where students have experienced significant disruption, however, some flexibility may be required. Each student must be made aware of the evidence that is going to be used and understand that the range of evidence used to determine a grade is not negotiable.

Although there is no minimum requirement of content that students must have been taught, Heads of Centre will be required to confirm that students have been taught sufficient content to form the basis for a grade.

¹ Teachers should have confidence that any homework used is the work of the student.

Retention of evidence

It is important that evidence on which a student's grade is based, including copies of the student's work where available and any mark records, is retained safely by the school. It will be needed to support:

- the school's determination of students' grades;
- the internal and external support and quality assurance processes; and
- the appeals process.

Scanned copies of handwritten evidence or other digital documentation will be acceptable. Schools must also retain any information relating to a student's access arrangements, or personal circumstances affecting student performance, which might need to be taken into account during the process of determining a student's grade. Schools should keep records of student evidence and a record of any discussions with students around the evidence on which grades will be based readily accessible so it can be found if a student wishes to appeal their grade.

If some evidence of students' work is not available, the marks can still be used in determining the final grade. The evidence that is available can be considered by OxfordAQA if the student decides to appeal.

Stage 3: Evaluate the quality of the evidence

OxfordAQA's guidance document, on [Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of assessed grades](#), gives guidance on how to balance the different sources of evidence when making a grading decision. In addition to that guidance, consideration could be given to the following:

- Coverage of assessment objectives;
- Coverage of content;
- Authenticity – is the evidence the student's own work?
- Level of control – was it taken in timed conditions? Was there an opportunity for redrafting? Was it supervised?
- Marking – how much support was available when applying the mark scheme? What internal standardisation processes have been applied?

Stage 4: Establish whether the proposed range of evidence is appropriate for all students

Wherever possible the same range of evidence should be used for all students in a class or cohort, although there may be individual students for whom the proposed evidence is not appropriate. The rationale for any exceptions must be documented by the school.

Each student must only be graded on their performance based on the subject content they have been taught. Before finalising grading decisions, teachers should satisfy themselves that each student has been taught the content in line with the proposed evidence. Students must be told what evidence is going to be used and it is recommended that any student's views are recorded and documented along with reasons for the final decision.

Some students may have missed a section of teaching due to valid reasons such as bereavement or long-term illness, or it may be the case that reasonable adjustments or access arrangements weren't in place for a particular assessment. Where such adjustments/arrangements weren't in place, teachers must consider whether to either:

- a) use the evidence when assigning a grade on the basis that it is the most appropriate evidence available, and disregarding it would disadvantage the student – if this is the case, the impact must be accounted for at stage 5 (see below), and the rationale recorded; or
- b) use alternative evidence to replace assessments that are not appropriately representative of individual students' performance and if so, document decisions appropriately.

Stage 5: Assign a grade

Teachers' grading decisions will be subject to a school's overall quality assurance processes.

Grades should be based on a holistic, objective judgement of the evidence of the students' performance on the subject content they have been taught. **Consider the quality of the work in relation to the assessment materials used as well as the grade descriptors and grading exemplification available to help reach a final grade.**

These materials exemplify the established performance standard that is maintained each year by OxfordAQA and is to be applied in grading judgements this May/June. This will help to ensure that there is a common basis to all assessed grades. It should be no easier or more difficult for a student to achieve a grade this year based on their performance than in previous years, as outlined in OxfordAQA's [Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of assessed grades: May/June 2021](#). Further information on the descriptors and grading exemplification is provided in the next section.

Decisions about potential must not factor in the student's grades. For example, if all the evidence collected for a student is of grade 6 and 7 standard, there would be no reason to consider providing that student any other grades. Further guidance on making holistic grading decisions is provided in the supporting document: [Worked examples to assist teachers making grading decisions](#).

Finally, teachers should reflect on their judgements. Refer to [Information for schools about making objective judgements in relation to awarding qualifications in 2021](#).

Additional points about grading:

- Ensure that the grades represent a holistic judgement. The grading process this year is not intended to be a formulaic calculation, and should account for the context in which each student's evidence has been produced.
- For tiered GCSEs, your grade must reflect the tier of entry.
- Reasonable adjustments for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place when evidence was generated. Where they were not, schools should consider using other evidence or take it into account when coming to their judgement. Where appropriate, this should include input from relevant specialist teachers and other professionals and it must be appropriately recorded/documented.
- Special consideration requests will not apply in the usual way this May/June because students will not be taking their exams. However, where illness or other personal

circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, schools should bear that in mind when making their judgements (see stage 4, above). Another opportunity may be made available to replace that evidence with another piece where there is a justified rationale recorded for doing so.

- Note that teachers are not making grading decisions in isolation. Once grades have been assigned, schools internal quality assurance process will ensure that standards are appropriate prior to sign-off by the Head of Centre.

Using grade descriptors and exemplification

Grade descriptors and grading exemplification must be used to make holistic judgements about student performance.

The grade descriptors

Grade descriptors are general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics. They are based on the assessment objectives for the relevant specification. Assessment objectives are found in the relevant subject specification. **Only the OxfordAQA grade descriptors apply to OxfordAQA qualifications.**

The grading exemplification

OxfordAQA has created grading exemplification for each specification and this will be made available by 19 April. The grading exemplification uses student responses from historical examination scripts (and other sources) to illustrate mid-grade performance in previous series in which exams took place. The exemplification gives examples of the standards you will use to make grading judgements.

Grading exemplification is specific to each awarding organisation. It should be familiar and reflect the specification that you have taught.

Using the descriptors and exemplification

A holistic judgement about the grade will be made based on the evidence.

Using the grade descriptors

Grade descriptors will help identify how the range of evidence for a student aligns with the expected performance standards.

Review the evidence. Read through the grade descriptors. Match the student's evidence to the suitable statements within the grade descriptors.

A student's collection of evidence may contain characteristics from different grade descriptors. For example, a student may show characteristics of a Grade 6 in one area, and characteristics of a Grade 2 in another area. For assistance with making grading decisions in such situations, please refer to [Worked examples to assist teachers making grading decisions](#).

These grade descriptors do not highlight performance characteristics for all grades. Teachers should determine the grade most appropriate for the standard of work produced by a student and must consider the full range of grades available when doing so. When considering which grade is most appropriate, consider:

- Each descriptor contains several statements describing features of typical performance at a grade, against which a student's evidence can be reviewed. If a student's evidence securely matches the statements in a specific grade (eg Grade 6), consider the next descriptor above (eg Grade 8).
- If a student's evidence goes beyond aspects of the statements at grade 6 in some areas, but does not match any (or few) of the statements in the higher descriptor (eg Grade 8), then the teacher can provide the intermediary grade, where one exists (eg Grade 7).
- The same logic can apply across the grade range (eg Grade D for AS and A level).
- Where a student's evidence has been graded, this may provide further assurance for the decision on a student's grade.
- At GCSE, to achieve grade 1, students' evidence will show that they have demonstrated engagement with sufficient content, achieved some credit across elements of the specification content, and achieved credit in some assessment objectives. Where the evidence for a student does not support this, the student should be graded unclassified (U). At AS and A-level, student should be graded unclassified (U) if their evidence does not meet the minimum requirements of most of the statements within the grade E descriptor.

At GCSE, if a student's performance is stronger than the grade descriptors for a grade 8, you should consider assigning a grade 9.

At A-level, if a student's performance is stronger than the grade descriptors for a grade A, you should consider assigning a grade A*.

Evidence should be compared with the exemplification provided by OxfordAQA.

Exemplification will not cover all areas of the specification. The same standard, as illustrated in the exemplification, must be applied to other pieces of student evidence.

Reaching a grade judgement

Professional experience and judgement will form a key part of this process. Due consideration must be given to all the evidence collected for each student.

You should make a holistic judgement where evidence crosses grade descriptors, balancing coverage of differently graded work across the course of study and accounting for conditions in which evidence was collected.

The use of tracking data and predicted grades in reaching grading decisions

One source of data which is available to schools is tracking systems that provide target grades or predicted grades based on assessment inputs and data modelling. The final grade is derived solely based on performances produced by students, so a grade derived based on a predicted trajectory or target grade is not permitted.

For example:

- if a student is currently performing consistently at a grade B standard, they should be awarded a grade B;
- and if a student's tracking data shows improvement over the year, having produced grade C level work in the first half of the year, and grade B work thereafter, the student should be awarded a grade B, even if a tracking system suggests that the candidate could potentially have achieved a grade A based on their trajectory.

USING DATA TO SUPPORT THE GRADING PROCESS

Introduction

Used appropriately, data on historical student and school performance can help support the internal quality assurance process for assigning grades. The purpose of reviewing data on past performance is **not** to attempt to determine a student or a school's outcomes this May/June, but as one source of evidence from examination series which operated as normal, that can inform teachers' professional judgement on the level of attainment achieved by their students.

Accordingly, schools are advised to consider the profile of their results in previous years **in which exams have taken place**, as outlined in [Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of assessed grades: May/June 2021](#). Schools can use this to undertake a high-level check once grades have been assigned to students, to ensure that they have applied a consistent standard in their assessment of the 2021 cohort compared to previous years in which exams took place.

Schools must ensure that grade judgements have been recorded for students in the current assessments before considering historical records of mark data and grade distributions for students in previous assessments at the school.

New schools will not have any historical data, so will need to focus attention on other aspects of quality assurance. If a school has changed status, merged, or split in recent years, it will need to be taken into account when considering what data to collate.

The use of data in reviewing overall school outcomes

Schools should be aware of the distribution of grades awarded to students in previous series where exams have taken place. However, grading judgements should not be driven by this data. Historical grade data should only be considered after grading judgements have been made.

What data needs to be considered?

Schools are advised to compile information on the grades awarded to students in past series in which exams took place, where they can be confident that a consistent standard was applied. The usefulness of this information will depend on the following:

- The size of the school's cohort from year to year – the larger the cohort, the more useful the data could be.

- The stability of the school's overall grade outcomes from year to year – the more stable the outcomes are, the more confident the school can be that variation would likely be low in 2021, had exams taken place.

This information should be compiled for each grade, for each subject/qualification and for each school as a whole, as it is important to consider both subject and school level variation during the internal quality assurance review. It is likely that the size of the cohort and the stability of the outcomes will be higher for all subjects combined than for a single subject.

Some GCSE students may have received a mixture of A*-G and 9-1 grades. Where necessary, consider outcomes at the points of alignment between the two grade scales: 7/A, 4/C and 1/G when compiling historical data. This [guide from OxfordAQA](#) illustrates how the grade scales relate to each other.

When collating the information, schools should compile and review data across multiple years even if a school changed awarding organisation in a subject. Schools may also wish to bring together other data sources that may help quality assure the grades determined in 2021.

When aggregating outcomes across all subjects, schools should consider omitting subjects that are no longer offered from the historical data, to provide a more valid comparison with the grades derived in 2021. Where schools have taken on private candidates in previous series, and/or in the current series, they should generally be excluded from this data.

Looking at school's outcomes over a three-year period in which exams took place (2017 to 2019), at subject and at school level, may be a good approach to benchmarking outcomes for 2021. This will help when considering year-on-year fluctuations in outcomes. In instances where there are fewer years of historical data, however, this is still likely to be useful.

The May/June 2020 series should not be used for benchmarking purposes, as the last consistent set of grading standards was set in 2019. The school assessment grades used as a basis for final outcomes in May/June 2020 were based on a different consideration to that for the current series. In May/June 2020, schools were asked to provide the grade that they considered the student would most likely have achieved had exams taken place. In 2021, grades must be based on the evidence produced by students. Therefore, schools should consider how 2020 outcomes related to the school's historical outcomes before referring to them as part of the internal review.

Internal quality assurance: using the data to inform the overall review of outcomes

After all grading decisions have been made, schools should review the aggregate cumulative grade distribution for each subject, and qualification type (eg GCSE, AS/A-level). If outcomes are much higher than in previous years, or much lower, the reasons for it should be considered. Identify evidence for any recurring trends in the profile of performance at the school over previous years, such as strong results for some subjects or specific student groups. Comparisons should be contextualised with other information at school level, for example data that suggests the cohort in a particular subject, or overall, is more or less able than in previous years (where exams have taken place) – for example, tracking data, prior assessment data, or a change in the profile of the cohort.

Also consider the grades awarded to different groups of students, including those with certain characteristics, as well as considering gender and disadvantage. Is each group's grade profile different from previous years, or compared with other groups? If so, why is that

the case? Take particular care when assessing patterns of grades for small groups, where a single candidate may have a large effect.

It is recommended that a school makes a record of these comparisons and the rationale for any variations as part of the internal quality assurance process, in order that it can be discussed with OxfordAQA during any virtual visits.

It is possible that, following this review, schools may need to reflect on the grading standard that your teachers have applied in one or more subjects. Do not, however, apply any historical insights inconsistently to students within a subject. If an issue is identified which cuts across several or most subjects, a review across all subjects may be needed. **At all times, however, remember that it is the evidence of students' work that must form the basis for each student's grade.** For example, the fact that no student at a school might have achieved an A* at A level, or a grade 1 at GCSE, in previous years is not a valid barrier to awarding these grades to a student who has demonstrated attainment to that level.

Once the review is complete

Schools may be asked to provide a statement explaining the rationale of the outcomes by subject and/or qualification type level. This must include details of how they compare in previous years in which exams were sat, and an explanation for this – for example, if the school's cohort were known to be particularly strong or weak relative to previous years; any changes at the school that might have contributed to the level of attainment achieved by students in particular subjects; or the size of the cohort means that comparisons between years are considered unreliable.

Guidance on the use of additional assessment materials for 2021

OxfordAQA will provide additional assessment materials for use in May/June 2021. These materials are not exams but can be used to generate evidence to help determine a grade for each student. Use of these materials is optional and the extent to which these materials are relied upon to inform decision-making may vary across schools. They are intended to provide evidence of knowledge or to validate a previous assessment. Where appropriate assessment evidence is already available from the course of study, there is no need to replace this with new evidence.

OxfordAQA's existing assessment materials (including past papers and examiners' reports) will all be available as normal. In addition, the following materials will be made available to schools:

- 31 March:** Additional Assessment Materials (sets of questions, mark schemes and mapping) and grade descriptors
- 12 April:** Additional support materials (answers with examiner commentary)
- 19 April:** Additional support materials (grading exemplification)

These additional assessment materials (sets of questions, mark schemes and mapping grids) may be used at any point from 31 March until the date grades are submitted to OxfordAQA. Sufficient time must be allowed to follow each school's internal quality assurance processes before grades are submitted to OxfordAQA by 18 June.

What are the 2021 additional assessment materials?

The 2021 assessment materials are qualification-specific sets of questions covering key knowledge, understanding and skills (made available by 31 March).

The materials are available for all GCSE, AS and A-level specifications.

They are drawn from a variety of examination questions and from a range of papers; they do not cover any NEA components.

The number, breadth and depth of the material will vary between subjects, and reflect the characteristics of each qualification (eg where there is only one exam component there will be fewer materials than for a subject which is usually assessed entirely by examination). However, where possible the assessments will draw on the equivalent of three series' worth of examination material.

Additional support materials will also be provided. The additional support will, where available, include example responses and links to other information which will help with using and marking these assessment materials.

Subject specific mapping grids are also available. These documents:

- map coverage of assessment objectives, content and/or skills covered within each set of questions;
- direct schools to where the question originally came from, allowing them to access further support materials as required; and

What is the purpose of additional assessment materials?

The additional assessment materials are an optional part of the range of evidence that can be used to decide on each student's grade. They are made up of a mixture of past material (both material already openly published and material currently only available to schools) and specimen material where required. They are presented in a different format, with their original numbering, to make them more flexible and adaptable, enabling you to select appropriate content to use with your students. These materials will assist you in assessing student performance in areas not assessed elsewhere. Their use will allow students to demonstrate their performance towards the end of their course of study.

How and when should additional assessment materials be used?

These materials may be used in a variety of ways, at any point after they are released. For example, they could be set as a test, including remotely if required, or as a class or homework activity. However, if this work is going to contribute towards the determination of a student's grade, it must represent their own work.

In particular the materials could be used to:

- give students the opportunity to show what they know, understand or can do in an area of content that has been taught but not yet assessed;
- give students an opportunity to show improvement eg to validate or replace an existing piece of evidence; and
- support consistency of judgement between teachers or classes within a school by giving students the same task to complete where appropriate (and with Reasonable Adjustments made where required).

Assessment materials may be used in the form provided or tailored to better match the content that has been taught. Teachers can decide which activities should be completed, with the task being set, the student work collected and then marked using the accompanying mark scheme - drawing on other available support materials where provided. Schools should have arrangements in place to ensure consistent application of the marking schemes across different departments and/or sites (as described in [Internal quality assurance process](#)).

Although the materials are organised as groups of questions, there is the option to tailor the materials in line with the content that has been taught. Different materials may be combined and/or elements that are not required can be removed. For example, if a multi-part question includes a part which focuses on an element of the specification that hasn't been covered, it may be removed and the marks available reduced accordingly.

Once all the students' work has been marked, if there is reason to believe an outcome doesn't reflect a student's usual level of performance, because of a specific circumstance – for example because of the conditions the student completed the work in – it doesn't have to be included in your range of evidence. Other evidence could be used, or the student could be given another opportunity to complete a different piece of work. Reference should be made to the guidance on grading for teachers section of this document to understand whether evidence is sufficient to award a grade. Reasons for any decisions must be recorded.

Do these materials need to be administered in exam conditions?

No. These materials are not exams and they do not need to be completed under examination conditions. A group of questions could be set as a classroom test or as homework, for example. Activities could be administered remotely, for example if a student is self-isolating or conditions require it. These are flexible activities, but students' performance should be considered in the light of the conditions in which the activity was completed.

Where an activity is completed under supervision, for example, the time the student has spent on the task, what materials have helped them and whether they have received any additional support, is known. These facts should be considered in assessing student performance and recorded as appropriate.

A student's normal access arrangements should be considered and implemented when work is set, especially if it is to be taken under timed, test conditions. Please see the section on [Reasonable adjustments, access arrangements and special consideration](#) of this document.

What if students have seen some of this material before?

These materials are not exams, nor are they designed to play the role of exams.

It is understood that students may have seen some material previously. The purpose of any materials should be considered before they are included in the range of evidence. It would be inappropriate to advise students on the content of any upcoming assessment. If a student has recently completed a particular activity there may be little benefit to them completing the same or a very similar activity again.

Sets of questions do not need to be kept securely (as exam papers would be) but the extent to which students should know what activity they will complete in advance should be considered. Additionally, if it is decided that all students in a cohort sit the same activity under test conditions, this should happen on the same day to maximise fairness for all students in a school.

What support materials will be provided?

Support materials will also include:

- marked examples of student work from past papers where they exist and support the marking of student work;
- links to other information which will help with using and marking these assessment materials.

Understanding the outcomes

The assessment materials are groups of questions focused on discrete areas of a specification and may vary in breadth and demand depending on the topic. Therefore, unlike full past papers, there are no grade boundaries available. There is no requirement for the mark from an assessment to be converted into a grade, the mark should be considered alongside other pieces of evidence. Any gaps in the range of evidence should be considered when the materials are selected. For example, reference could be made to the grade descriptors for the subject and target a particular aspect of the grade descriptor to ensure the appropriateness of the grading decision. This would be particularly relevant where an area of the specification referenced in the descriptor has been taught, but not yet evidenced.

Reasonable adjustments, access arrangements and special consideration

Reasonable adjustments and access arrangements

Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators leaders and assessors have previously been advised to continue to process online applications as if examinations were taking place this May/June. This will formalise the arrangements for the student's assessments and will ensure consistency as per the requirements outline within the OxfordAQA General Terms and Conditions for approved schools 2020-21.

An online application may be processed after 31 March 2021 provided the student meets the published criteria for the arrangement and the full supporting evidence is available for inspection.

Every effort must be made to ensure that students' approved access arrangements and/or reasonable adjustments are put in place for any assessments used to determine assessed grades. This applies regardless of whether the access arrangement/reasonable adjustment was approved online or delegated to schools. This includes such things as the use of a reader or supervised rest breaks.

The use of access arrangements/reasonable adjustments must be discussed with specialist teachers (where appropriate), students and parents/carers in advance of any additional evidence being gathered. This will ensure that all parties are aware of the arrangements the school is making to ensure accessibility of the assessments.

Teachers will be required to confirm whether the approved access arrangement/reasonable adjustment was in place for assessments which will be used to determine the student's grade. This must be recorded on the [Assessment Record](#). It is better not to use evidence if access arrangements were not in place when they were meant to be.

Schools must securely hold on file all evidence used to determine the assessed grades including access arrangements/reasonable adjustments provided, until the published deadline for appeals has passed. However, if a student's result is subject to an ongoing appeal, malpractice investigation or other results enquiry after the published deadline for appeals, then the evidence must be retained until this has been completed.

If the access arrangement/reasonable adjustment was not in place, the teacher must record the reason for this and be able demonstrate that this was taken into account when making their final judgement.

The range of evidence is flexible and can be tailored to an individual student according to coverage of the specification.

Schools are encouraged to share all access arrangements evidence where a student is transitioning between schools. The entering school must check the paperwork and ensure that the arrangement is still appropriate, practicable and reasonable.

The OxfordAQA publication [Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments](#) provides further detailed information.

Special consideration

The usual process of schools submitting special consideration applications to OxfordAQA for qualifications will not apply to May/June 2021.

As the range of evidence is flexible and can be tailored to an individual student according to coverage of the specification, then instances of special consideration should be limited. Schools should be able to select work completed by a student where they were unaffected by adverse circumstances.

Where this is not possible and a temporary illness, a temporary injury or some other event outside of the student's control may have affected their performance in assessments which will be used to determine a grade, teachers should take this into account and document how they have done so. Special consideration cannot be applied due to lost teaching and learning. This can be addressed through the flexibility of the range of evidence schools may use to determine students' grades. Students should only be assessed on the content of the specification covered.

Schools must be satisfied that the issue or event has had, or is reasonably likely to have had, a material effect on a student's ability to demonstrate his or her normal level of attainment in an assessment.

Schools must record how they determined the impact of the misfortune.

Students must be reminded to raise any mitigating circumstances which warrant special consideration. It is important that students raise these issues as soon as possible, ideally **at the time of the assessment and prior to the submission of the teacher assessed grade.**

Guidance for schools on modifying sets of questions

OxfordAQA believes that schools are best placed to modify the sets of questions provided as additional assessment materials to cater for individual student needs. Schools will know the needs of their students and their normal ways of working. Schools will be experienced in

modifying assessment materials for use in the classroom, for internal tests and mock examinations.

Appropriate adjustments for students with visual impairments

As per the OxfordAQA [General Terms and Conditions for approved schools 2020-21](#), appropriate reasonable adjustments should be made to any additional assessment materials used in schools. To ensure this, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators should continue to liaise with teaching and other school staff to ensure the most suitable arrangements for students with visual impairments. Appropriate adjustments might include:

- the use of a computer reader for tests which are predominately text based
- the use of a reader
- enlarging assessment material on screen
- the use of a 'colour namer', particularly in a subject such as Geography where there are maps.

The OxfordAQA publication [Access Arrangements and Reasonable Adjustments](#) provides detailed information.

- Advice on providing written or verbal descriptions of images.
- Before providing a written or verbal description of a picture, remember to read the question that goes with the image. This will help to describe only the necessary detail.
- Always give the context to the image. For example, "this is an article from a website about running" or "this is a photograph of snowy mountains."
- Always describe what you see in the picture. For example, "there is a picture of a woman running. She is wearing a tracksuit and trainers." Remember to keep your sentences short and name the things that are needed to answer the question.
- Always avoid interpretation or assumption. For example, say "a woman and child" rather than a "mother and daughter."

Advice on creating sets of questions from OxfordAQA past papers

- Schools will be able to copy and paste text and questions and then ensure the font is the correct size, bold and in Arial. It is recommended that for questions with mathematical fractions, equations, tables, graphs and images the relevant questions are printed from the past papers. Remember to have all material per question from the question paper, source booklet and diagram book.
- A4 18 point bold can be enlarged to A3 24 point bold.
- A4 24 point bold can be enlarged to A3 36 point bold.
- If material is to be used with read/write text to speech technology, for text questions you will be able to copy and paste as above. For those questions with mathematical fractions, equations, tables, graphs and images, it is recommended that schools create the normal way of working for their students as they would for classroom materials.

The mark scheme

Avoid changing the mark scheme. Consistency of approach is essential. Any errors made, omissions of questions or information needed to answer the question, may have implications at the appeals stage.

Support from OxfordAQA

OxfordAQA will continue to provide support to schools with advice and guidance on how to modify the additional assessment material resources for use in classroom assessments.

OxfordAQA recognises that the additional assessment materials are being provided in a different way to past examination material and that these may present an issue for some teachers with visual impairments. In these cases, schools should contact OxfordAQA and we will aim to provide extra support and guidance.

Where schools feel unable to modify the sets of questions, OxfordAQA will work with them to find an appropriate solution which in exceptional circumstances may include the production of modified versions, whether in a modified enlarged format or in Braille.

Schools should ideally contact OxfordAQA as soon as possible and no later than 30 April 2021.

OxfordAQA will endeavour to produce the modified materials within ten working days of the request being received. This will be dependent on the complexity of the subject and the discussions between the school and OxfordAQA.

OxfordAQA's contact details in relation to modified assessments are:
modifiedassessments@aqa.org.uk

SUBMISSION OF GRADES

OxfordAQA will contact schools with further information in the coming weeks. The final date for entering grades will be on 18 June 2021.

OxfordAQA will provide details on how to input students' grades in the collection system.

The overall subject grades are confidential and must not be given to students or parents/guardians.

What to consider when submitting grades

OxfordAQA will ask for the following information:

- A grade for each student
- In the case of tiered GCSE subjects, schools should provide grades that reflect their tier of entry.

A teacher can include a 'U' (ungraded).

OxfordAQA will collect grade decisions for the optional endorsement in speaking and listening in International GCSE English Language at the same time as assessed grades. OxfordAQA will confirm its individual arrangements to schools.

Head of Centre declaration

A declaration by the Head of Centre is required to finalise the submission of grades. Further information on submission will be provided along with details of grade submission.

GUIDANCE FOR SCHOOLS ACCEPTING PRIVATE CANDIDATES

Please note that the interim guidance for schools accepting Private Candidate entries for GCSE, AS and A-level qualifications in May/June 2021 is [available on our website](#).

This guidance provides an overview of those elements of the assessment process that are particularly relevant for Private Candidates in May/June 2021. It applies to Private Candidates taking GCSEs, AS or A-levels.

This guidance has been written with Private Candidates in mind, but may also apply to some other students, particularly those who have changed schools recently.

Private Candidates

Private Candidates are students who have not studied with the school that makes their exam entry. Included in this group are, for example:

- school age students who have been home educated;
- adults who have studied independently;
- students who have studied with a distance learning provider which does not offer exam entry;

- students at a school who have studied an additional subject outside of the school; and students returning to their former school to resit a qualification.

This guidance also applies to students at a school who have studied an additional subject outside of the school.

Overview of assessment process

Private candidates will be assessed in a similar way to other students this year. Schools will have considerable flexibility to determine the appropriate range of evidence for students. Schools that assess private candidates will be able to select evidence which reflects the student's particular circumstances, including the content they've covered in their studies. This may differ from the evidence they have for their own students.

Schools who agree to accept private candidates will need to work with them (for example, via a short interview or a questionnaire) to understand how they've been studying, what evidence they may have already generated, and how much of the specification content they have covered in their studies.

This will help schools to determine what pre-existing evidence is available, and whether that existing evidence provides sufficient evidence on its own. If that student is required to take additional assessment to provide more evidence of their performance, schools should consider whether any reasonable adjustments or access arrangements are required.

Evidence to support private candidates' grades may be reviewed during external quality assurance, but private candidates will not be included in the statistical analysis used to identify schools for checks this year, or school performance data that we use in the future.

Supervising assessments

Where a school wishes to supervise an assessment, but the student is unable to sit the assessment at the school, remote supervision can be used. Schools do not need to have specialist remote invigilation software – the student could be observed remotely using standard video conferencing software (for example, Microsoft Teams or Zoom). Schools must ensure that however assessments are conducted, they are the student's own, unaided work.

Quality assurance and appeals

Private Candidates' results should be included in a school's internal quality assurance checks as far as possible, but they may need to be excluded from wider quality assurance exercises where, for example, their evidence base is different from the school's other students. Private Candidates should also be excluded from any check using the school's historical data. Evidence to support Private Candidates' grades may be reviewed during external quality assurance, but they will be treated separately in statistical analysis used to identify schools for checks. Private Candidates will not affect a school's published results or historical performance. For this reason, it is important that schools indicate which students are Private Candidates when entering them for qualifications, unless the candidate is primarily an internal candidate taking one or more additional non-taught subject.

Appeals for Private Candidates will follow the same process as for other students. More information on appeals will be provided in due course.

Types of evidence

Pre-existing evidence

Some Private Candidates may have already generated a significant amount of evidence during their studies, including essays, assignments and mock exams – while others may have no pre-existing evidence. Before deciding whether to accept pre-existing evidence a school will want to consider the conditions under which it was produced and the level of confidence they can have in its authenticity.

Where evidence has been set, supervised and/or marked by a third party, the school should ask for the evidence to be submitted to it directly by that third party, along with a supporting statement confirming:

- the conditions under which the assessments were taken;
- whether any reasonable adjustments, access arrangements or special consideration were applied;
- that the third party is not aware of any potential conflicts of interest, for example that there is no personal or family relationship between the student and tutor; and
- that the third party will cooperate with the school and the awarding organisation if needed, for example, during the appeals process.

The school should make appropriate arrangements with the third party for the retention of evidence from the Private Candidate, in line with this guidance.

Pre-existing evidence must not be accepted if the school has concerns about its authenticity, for example if the standard of work is much higher than in comparable assessments completed under school supervision.

Sources of evidence

The following guidance may be helpful:

Source of evidence	Examples	Guidance for schools
Evidence set, supervised and/or marked by a tutor or organisation with whom the school has an established relationship.	This might apply, for example, where the student has studied with a distance learning provider which has established links with the exam school accepting the entry - or where the school has appointed a specialist tutor to work with the student.	In this case the school may accept the evidence and grading judgement of the third party, provided it has no grounds for concern about authenticity. Alternatively, the school may accept the evidence and make its own grading decision, for example where other assessments are also being taken. The evidence and grade should still be subject to internal quality assurance checks to ensure, for example, that all of the necessary documentation has been completed.
Evidence set, supervised and/ or marked by an educational organisation recognised by OxfordAQA.	This might apply, for example, where a student has completed some work with one of the following: distance learning provider another approved exam centre community language school hospital or prison education service performing arts organisation pupil referral unit	In this case the school may accept the evidence and grading judgements of the third party provided it has no grounds for concern about authenticity. The school will want to obtain assurances from the person responsible for the student's assessment that the approach taken meets the awarding organisation requirements. Alternatively, the school may accept the evidence and make its own grading

	This may also apply to students who have moved schools or colleges during the course of study.	<p>decision, for example where other assessments are also being taken.</p> <p>The evidence and grade should still be subject to internal quality assurance checks to ensure, for example, that all of the necessary documentation has been completed.</p>
Evidence set, supervised and/ or marked by a private tutor with whom the school has no established relationship.	This might apply, for example, where a student has completed some assessments with a private tutor, arranged independently by the student or their parents.	<p>Exceptionally, in cases where the student does not have sufficient other pre-existing evidence, the school may accept evidence generated with a private tutor but should always validate the student's performance by setting at least one other assessment under school supervision.</p> <p>If there is a marked difference in performance, the student should be asked to complete further assessments in order to establish the student's performance standard.</p> <p>The final grading decision should be taken by the school on the basis of the full range of available evidence.</p> <p>The evidence and grade should be subject to internal quality assurance checks.</p> <p>Evidence produced with a tutor should not be accepted where the school has taught the student that subject.</p>
Evidence set, supervised and/or marked by the student's parent or produced independently by the student.	<p>This might apply where a student has studied completely independently or with only parental support and supervision.</p> <p>This category does not include evidence that has been set and marked by another education provider, and produced under parental supervision at their request (eg the students remote learning during lockdown).</p>	<p>Evidence in this category should not be accepted due to the potential conflict of interest.</p> <p>In this case the school should develop a range of evidence based on assessments drawn from awarding organisation materials, or school devised materials.</p>

Some schools may prefer not to accept pre-existing evidence and instead to set new assessments on which the grade will be based. Some schools may also offer the student a choice of approaches. This is at the discretion of the school, provided that students are informed of this in advance so that they can make an informed choice when selecting a school and can provide their view as to the composition of the evidence base that will be used to determine their grade.

Assessment materials provided by OxfordAQA

Schools may want to base one or more assessments on the additional assessment materials provided by OxfordAQA, or on available past exam papers. Further information on the additional assessment materials can be found in the section [Guidance on the use of additional assessment materials for 2021](#).

The school should ensure the Private Candidate is assessed only on what they have studied, like other students. This should be informed by the initial conversation they had with the student, as well as any other pre-existing evidence provided.

Additional assessments

In some cases, particularly where there is no suitable pre-existing evidence, schools might wish to set additional assessments in order to ensure that the range of evidence available to them is sufficient to enable them to determine an appropriate grade. This might also be useful in cases where a student's performance is considered borderline and additional evidence would help to support the school's final grading decision.

In some situations, where other assessment methods are not suitable and the student is comfortable with this method of assessment, a verbal assessment might be useful to help confirm the final grade for the student. If this is used, the assessment should be recorded so that it can be referred to later during internal and external quality assurance and, where necessary, the school review and appeals process. The focus of the assessment should be to assess the student's knowledge and skills as required by the specification.

MALPRACTICE

OxfordAQA greatly appreciates all of the hard work that schools will undertake in setting out and implementing their processes to determine grades. Schools are required to submit grades that have been determined in line with published guidance and their own Centre Policy.

The decision to not go ahead with exams in May/June 2021 means that the causes and drivers for malpractice will be different to those in a normal examination series. However, malpractice can still occur through genuine error or intent, particularly around the determination of grades. A minority of school staff may fail to appropriately adhere to the guidance in determining grades and some students might attempt to gain an unfair advantage.

To support schools in these challenging times we have set out below some of the circumstances in which OxfordAQA will investigate potential malpractice concerns. Please note that the list is not intended to be exhaustive and there may be other instances of potential malpractice which will require investigation.

School/schools staff

OxfordAQA will investigate credible allegations of malpractice or issues reported from our monitoring processes that raise concerns about a failure to follow the published requirements for determining grades. Examples include:

- Exam entries are created for students who had not studied the course of entry or had not intended to enter for May/June 2021.
- Grades created for students who have not been taught sufficient content to provide the basis for that grade.
- Deliberately and inappropriately disregarding the school's published policy when determining grades.
- Fabricating evidence of candidate performance to support an inflated grade.
- Deliberately providing inappropriate levels of support before or during an assessment, including deliberate disclosure of mark schemes and assessment materials, to support an inflated grade.
- Intentionally submitting inflated grades.

- A failure to retain evidence used in the determination of grades in accordance with the OxfordAQA Grading guidance.
- A systemic failure to follow the Centre’s Policy in relation to the application of Access Arrangements or Special Consideration arrangements for students in relation to assessments used to determine grades.
- A failure to take reasonable steps to authenticate student work.
- A failure to appropriately manage Conflicts of Interest (COIs) within a school.
- Grades being released to students (or their parents/carers) before the issue of results
- Failure to cooperate with OxfordAQA’s quality assurance, appeal or investigation processes.
- Failure to conduct a school review or submit an appeal when requested to do so by a student.

Schools which identify such incidents should report them to OxfordAQA as normal, using the [M2 form](#).

Students

It is possible that some students may attempt to influence their teachers’ judgements about their grades.

Students might attempt to gain an unfair advantage during the school’s process by, for example, submitting fabricated evidence or plagiarised work. Such incidents would constitute malpractice and schools are asked to report these to OxfordAQA in the normal way using the [M1 form](#).

Students, or individuals acting on behalf of a student, such as parents/carers, might also try to influence grade decisions by applying pressure to schools or their staff. OxfordAQA anticipates that the majority of such instances will be dealt with by the school internally – in such cases, we ask that schools retain clear and reliable records of the circumstances and the steps taken, and that students are made aware of the outcome. However, if a student continues to inappropriately attempt to pressure school staff then please inform OxfordAQA using the [M1 form](#). OxfordAQA will contact your school if we receive credible allegations that such pressure has been applied in order that appropriate steps can be taken.

In all the scenarios listed above, as well as any others that have not been explicitly identified here, our [Suspected malpractice policies and procedures 2020-2021](#) continues to apply. Please be aware that, as always, all investigations into alleged malpractice remain confidential and the findings, including any sanctions imposed, are not publicly disclosed.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding malpractice, please contact irregularities@aqa.org.uk

RESULTS

The dates for the publication of results are being brought forward this May/June. This will see AS, A-level and GCSE results being published in the same week.

International AS and A-level qualifications

- AS and A-level results will be released to schools on **Monday 9 August 2021**.
- AS and A-level students will receive their results on **Tuesday 10 August 2021**.

International GCSE qualifications

- GCSE results will be released to schools on **Wednesday 11 August 2021**.
- GCSE students will receive their results on **Thursday 12 August 2021**.

APPEALS

School reviews and appeals to OxfordAQA

The arrangements for awarding grades to students in May/June 2021 include internal and external quality assurance measures which aim to ensure that on results day students are issued with fair and consistent grades that have been objectively reached. Sharing information with students about the evidence being used as part of a school's grade determination process is important and should help to avoid issues that may otherwise arise when results are issued.

Post results, the need for appeals should be limited as students should be confident in their grades because of the following:

- An effective Centre Policy which is adhered to by all school staff involved in the determination of teacher assessed grades, and which has been reviewed by awarding organisations.
- A high standard of internal quality assurance both in determining teacher assessed grades based only on student evidence and ensuring that there are no administrative or procedural errors.
- Effective provision of access arrangements for all eligible students.
- Effective arrangements for students that may have been disadvantaged during an assessment that contributes to their grade either by taking the circumstances into account in determining grades or by using alternative evidence that was unaffected by the adverse circumstances.
- Effective communication with students and parents/guardians so that they understand the schools approach to determining their grades before grades are submitted to OxfordAQA, including the evidence used and a realistic understanding of the standard at which they are performing. Schools should make students aware of the sources of evidence that will be used to determine their grade in advance of that grade being submitted to OxfordAQA. This transparency should enable students to raise any errors or circumstances relating to particular pieces of evidence to be taken into account in advance of the grade submission and should reduce the number of instances in which students need to appeal.
- Accurate recording and effective checking of information on the assessment record for the student to avoid errors in submitting teacher assessed grades.
- Effective oversight and clear professional accountability from the Head of Centre who will complete the Head of Centre Declaration.

The appeals process relies on excellent record-keeping through the assessment process. With this in mind, teachers/heads of department are required to:

- Document the sources of evidence used for determining grades for the class/cohort along with a rationale for what was selected.
- Document any exceptional circumstances for students, ie if a student's evidence is different from the subject cohort and the rationale for that; if approved access arrangements/reasonable adjustments were in place and if not, how they were taken account of when determining the grade; and how any mitigating circumstances such as illness were taken into account when determining the grade. We recommend schools document discussions with students about the range of evidence used.
- Maintain records as documented in their Centre Policy.
- Ensure that any evidence that is to be used to determine students' grades (eg student work and marks where work is not available) is stored safely and can be retrieved promptly by school staff, if needed for a school review or requested for an OxfordAQA appeal.

Students will need certain information to help them decide whether to appeal

If schools haven't shared the following information before results day, they will need to be prepared to do so on results day if students request it:

- The Centre Policy
- The sources of evidence used to determine their grade along with any grades/marks associated with them
- Details of any special circumstances that have been taken into account in determining their grade, eg access arrangements, mitigating circumstances such as illness

As previously described in this document, OxfordAQA will be providing assessment materials, guidance and training to support schools in making fair and consistent judgements which are without bias and will be conducting external quality assurance, including:

- reviewing Centre Policies; and
- sampling student work that has contributed to the range of evidence used in determining a grade.

Although every effort will be made to ensure that students are issued with the correct grades on results day, there will also be an appeals system as a safety net to resolve any errors not identified during the earlier parts of the process. Students who consider that an error has been made in determining their grade will have a right to appeal. We expect that there will be relatively few errors this year.

It is important that the evidence (students' work) upon which grades were determined and records are available to enable the school review to be conducted promptly after results are issued. Schools must take note of the OxfordAQA guidance on the [Retention of candidates' work for the May/June 2021 series](#).

There are two stages to the May/June 2021 appeals process:

Stage 1: school review

The first stage of the process is referred to as a **school review**. If a student does not consider that they have been issued with the correct grade, they can ask their school to check if an administrative or procedural error has occurred. The school will need to ensure the student is aware that their grade could go down, up or stay the same. If the school finds that an error has occurred, they will be able to submit a request to OxfordAQA to correct the error and amend the grade without the need to make an appeal to OxfordAQA. The rationale of this decision should be retained by the school and kept securely should a student wish to proceed to Stage 2.

Stage 2: appeal to OxfordAQA

The second stage of the process is referred to as an appeal to OxfordAQA (submitted by the school on the student's behalf). An appeal should be submitted if the student considers that the school did not follow its procedure properly, OxfordAQA has made an administrative error, or the student considers that the grade awarded was an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement. The school will need to ensure the student is aware that their grade could go down, up or stay the same.

Grounds for appeal

In summary there are four grounds upon which a school review or an appeal to OxfordAQA may be requested:

- **At stage 1:** The school made an administrative error, eg an incorrect grade was submitted; an incorrect assessment mark was used when determining the grade.
- **At stages 1 and 2:** The school did not apply a procedure correctly, such as the school did not follow its Centre Policy, did not undertake internal quality assurance, did not take account of access arrangements or mitigating circumstances such as illness.
- **At stage 2:** OxfordAQA made an administrative error, eg the grade was incorrectly changed by OxfordAQA during the processing of grades.
- **At stage 2:** The student considers that the school made an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement⁸ in the choice of evidence from which to determine the grade and/or the determination of the grade from that evidence.

A student will first need to be informed of the outcome of the school review. If they wish to appeal to OxfordAQA, they must then submit a request to their school to proceed. The appeal must be submitted according to the requirements of OxfordAQA.

Clear communication with students and parents/carers about the appeals process should clarify the need for student consent. Students should be made aware that OxfordAQA will determine the grade at appeal, that the grade could go down, up or stay the same and that the outcome will be final other than in instances of a process error by OxfordAQA.

2 A reasonable judgement is one that is supported by evidence. An exercise of judgement will not be unreasonable simply because a student considers that an alternative grade should have been awarded, even if the student puts forward supporting evidence. There may be a difference of opinion without there being an unreasonable exercise of judgement. The reviewer will not remark individual assessments to make fine judgements but will take a holistic approach based on the overall evidence.

The student must provide their written and recorded consent. Their grade could go down, up or remain the same at any stage in the school review and/or appeals process.

The school must conduct a school review and must also submit an appeal to OxfordAQA if requested to do so by a student. The appeal to OxfordAQA can only be submitted if the first stage, school review, has been completed and the outcome of the first stage issued to the student.

Please note that where an appeal raises significant concerns about a school's implementation of its policy, or where appeals do not appear to have been submitted as requested by students the school may be referred to OxfordAQA's malpractice investigation team for potential review and further action. It will be possible to ask OxfordAQA to prioritise some appeals, eg those that are needed for a place at Higher Education. The timelines for priority and non-priority appeals are outlined [on the timelines and key dates section](#).

ADDITIONAL TEMPLATES AND SUPPORT MATERIALS

A range of materials and templates are also being made available to assist schools and will be downloadable from the [OxfordAQA website](#).

[Centre policy template](#)

[Summary of Centre Policy form](#)

[Retention of evidence information](#)

[Worked examples to assist teachers making grading decisions](#)

[Information for schools about making objective judgements](#)

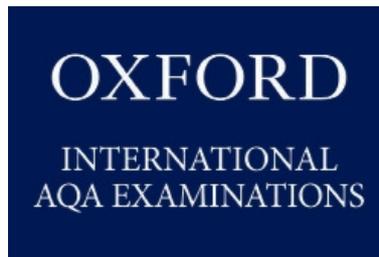
[Information for Heads of Centres, Heads of Department and teachers](#) on the submission of teacher assessed grades, in relation to awarding qualifications in May/June 2021

[Head of Department checklist](#)

[Guidance for students, parents and guardians](#)

[Guidance for non examination assessment \(NEA\) components](#)

[Assessment record template](#)



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