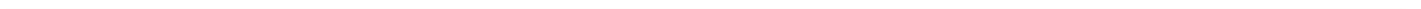




Joint Council for
Qualifications^{CIC}

Summer 2021 FAQs



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Do exam centres need to have contingency plans in place this year?

Normally, exam centres are required to prepare contingency plans in case there is an emergency with the examination venue or other problem that requires action to ensure examinations can take place. This year with the cancellation of GCSE and AS/A Level examinations in Summer 2021, the contingency plans usually put in place do not apply, but nevertheless it is important that centres prepare a plan relevant for the situation this year.

So far this year there has been an upsurge in cyber-security attacks on schools, in particular through, but not limited to, the criminal exploitation of ransomware. Schools should already have in place pro-active plans to minimise the risk of such cyber-attacks and recovery plans in place to recover from such an attack.

It is important that Heads of Centre, SLT and Governing Bodies in education settings understand the nature of the threat and the potential for ransomware to cause considerable damage to their institutions in terms of lost data (including evidence required to support this year's teacher assessed grades) and access to critical services.

Further information and resources are available from:

- National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC), information for schools: <https://www.ncsc.gov.uk/section/education-skills/schools>
 - » reporting an incident: <https://report.ncsc.gov.uk/>
- Updates on JCQ website: <https://www.jcq.org.uk/dfe-and-national-cyber-security-centre-ransomware-update/>

What should we do if we are subjected to a cyber-attack?

If subject to a cyber-attack, centres should:

- Enact your incident management plan
- Report to the NCSC: <https://report.ncsc.gov.uk/>
- Contact your local law enforcement and Action Fraud: <https://www.actionfraud.police.uk/>
- Inform the DfE by emailing: sector.securityenquiries@education.gov.uk

Does the contingency plan need to be included in a centre policy submission, and does it play a part in the quality assurance process?

There is no requirement for the Contingency plan as part of the centre policy. However, if further questions are asked in relation to the quality assurance process, you may be required to confirm that your contingency plan exists.

What should be included in my contingency plan?

Centres should review additional risks to the assessment, submission and determining of student grades this year to complete their contingency planning. In addition to the cyber-security risks outlined above, other threats that need to be considered could include:

- Teaching and other staff:
 - » Illness and/or incapacity of teachers responsible for determining student grades – this could affect the ability to collect and assess the range of evidence or create problems in terms of submission within the deadline;
 - » Illness and/or incapacity of the Head of Centre responsible for the overall Centre Policy and adherence to it, confirmed in the Head of Centre Declaration; and
 - » Illness and/or incapacity of the Exams Officer, who is usually responsible for uploading Centre Policies, teacher assessed grades and evidence requested.
- Physical infrastructure, leading to exclusion from or restriction of access to premises that may restrict the ability to complete any part of the QA process and/or submission of grades and evidence.

As part of their regular risk assessment, centres and their Governing Bodies may have identified other risks particular to their own situation that need to be included in a contingency plan.

How should a teacher balance the evidence when a student scores exceptionally highly on a series of additional materials questions, and less well in their other work?

While there is no one type of evidence that takes precedence, evidence gathered in conditions that enable confidence about the authenticity of the students' work will give more confidence in the overall holistic judgement. If a teacher identifies a difference in performance between different types of assessment evidence, their grading decision should reflect the evidence they consider, in their professional judgement, to more authentically represent the student's level of attainment.

Teachers should not place too much reliance on a source of evidence for which students had the opportunity to prepare /rehearse the answers, if that evidence is out of line with other evidence across the course.

For re-sitting students, can grades from previous examination series be used as evidence to support a grading judgement for a student?

Grades achieved in GCSEs during a course of study (for example, a grade achieved in November 2020 by a student who has continued to study through the rest of the 2020-21 academic year) or prior to starting a new course of study as a re-sitter (for example, a grade achieved in June 2020, after which a student began studying for a re-sit opportunity) can be used as evidence to support a grading judgement in the same qualification, for students that were planning to re-sit this summer.

We expect that this would be considered alongside evidence gathered more recently, to give a more accurate picture of a student's performance since their previous grade was achieved.

If no evidence has been gathered since the previous grade was achieved, there should not be an expectation of a student receiving a higher grade.

For EPQ, should boundaries from the Autumn/Winter 2020/21 series be used to guide grading decisions in summer 2021, or should teachers refer to boundaries from previous years?

The grading judgement must be based on the work completed by a student. When reviewing the work, teachers should refer to the mark scheme, in line with the NEA guidance. Given the restrictions that have been in place, some elements may have been more difficult to complete.

If, at the point of making grading decisions, there are elements of the student's work which reflect a significantly lower standard than the other sections, teachers should consider if this is the result of significant disruption at the time that the section was produced. If due to disruption, a grade should not be limited by elements which are at a lower standard or missing. If it is necessary to refer to grade boundaries when make a grading judgement, refer to boundaries from January 2020 and earlier. Grade boundaries from winter series in 2020-21 reflected the circumstances of those examination series and should not be referred to when making grading judgements.

Is my centre allowed to include a grade in our Year 11 leavers' report, which will be published before the end of the Summer Term?

Centres 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, which could be a grade or a mark, they must not share with students the grades they have or will submit to awarding organisations before results are released.

How many times does a student need to demonstrate one of the criteria described in a grade descriptor in order to attain it?

Grade descriptors are general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics and are not meant to be overly prescriptive. They are based on the assessment objectives for the relevant subject. The most appropriate grade to award will depend in practice upon the extent to which the student has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of the evidence may be balanced by better performances in others. The grade descriptors have been produced to underpin centre's holistic grading judgements.

For these reasons, it is not possible to specify the number of times a student must demonstrate the criteria, or whether they must demonstrate all the criteria. It is likely to differ by subject and also by grade.

How can teachers identify features of grade descriptors in student work, while also accounting for the mark schemes in assessment materials – are teachers expected to take a best-fit approach or not?

We advise teachers to use the mark schemes when assessing students' work and to take account of the coverage of the assessment objectives within the assessment materials. When assigning an overall grade to a student based on the evidence they have produced, the teacher should refer to the grade descriptors which provide general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics. They are based on the assessment objectives for the relevant subject.

What constitutes a special circumstance, when a teacher is considering if a piece of evidence 'doesn't reflect a student's usual level of performance' and should therefore be replaced or disregarded?

Special circumstances that may lead a teacher to disregard a piece of evidence or to replace it with another piece of evidence, would cover instances where students were not provided with their approved access arrangements or reasonable adjustments when completing their work.

This also applies where temporary illness or injury, bereavement, or some other event outside of the student's control might have temporarily affected their performance.

Can a student with sufficient evidence for a GCSE be entered for and awarded a grade this summer, even if they had not intended to complete their course of study until summer 2022?

These arrangements have been put in place as a result of the disruption to the education of students due to complete their courses of study in summer 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the government considered that exams could not be held in summer 2021 in a way which is, and which is perceived to be, fair. It is therefore not appropriate for students who had not intended to complete their course of study until summer 2022 to be awarded a GCSE this summer. The arrangements are in place to enable students who planned to take exams in summer 2021 to achieve grades.

Can a student receive a grade only on the basis of NEA work completed, if this is the only evidence available?

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.

Teachers are advised to consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support the judgement that is being made. Unless there is no time available to do so the teacher is advised to set additional assessments, where needed.

On submission of grades to the awarding organisation, Heads of Centre will declare they are satisfied that each student's grade is based on an appropriately broad range of evidence and that each student has been taught an appropriate amount of content to provide the basis for a grade. The most appropriate grade to award will depend in practice upon the extent to which the student has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of the student's performances may be balanced by better performances in other aspects.

If the student's specific circumstances prevent additional assessment evidence being generated, the grade descriptors could be used to underpin a centre's holistic grading judgements in assigning an appropriate grade to the student. The significance of the NEA in the specific qualification, and the standard of the students' evidence are relevant factors in that determination.

Can Art & Design and/or Extended Project Qualification (EPQ) grades can be shared with students?

Although GCSE and GCE AS/A Level Art & Design and EPQs are classified as non-examined assessment (NEA), by disclosing the grades the centres would, in essence, be providing a subject grade. This is not permitted.

As indicated in Ofqual's Conditions, subject grades are confidential and must not be shared with students, nor their parents/guardians. Under Ofqual's conditions, the endorsement grade can be released.

Can NEA marks be shared where the NEA is only one item in the range of evidence used?

Yes, where the NEA or partially completed NEA is only one of a number of pieces of evidence for the determination of teacher assessed grades, then the marks can be shared with learners. You must not do this when the work forms the sole source of evidence (e.g. EPQ, Art and Design portfolio).

Do centres have to offer internal appeal against NEA marks as in a normal year?

No. Awarding Organisations are not moderating NEA for GCSEs and A levels this year. While you might choose to use completed or partially completed NEA as one source of evidence of learner attainment, there is no requirement to do this and the work will not be being assessed as it normally would be. You do not have to offer learners the right to an internal appeal of the mark by the centre before the submission of teacher assessed grades.

Ofqual's guidance states that sources of evidence should be consistent across a class or cohort of students. What does 'consistent' mean in this context?

In its *Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades: summer 2021* publication, Ofqual states that 'as far as possible, the sources of evidence should be consistent across a class or cohort of students, and centres should record the reasons for their selection. The centre will make the final judgement about what is to be included and will need to document the rationale for any instances where consistent evidence is not used for a whole class or cohort'. In section 21, of the consultation document on guidance in relation to appeals under the GQAA framework in 2021, Ofqual refers to consistent evidence as being the same evidence. We therefore advise that, as far as possible, the same tasks should be used consistently across a class or cohort wherever possible.

When making grading judgements is it essential that the most recent evidence takes precedence over evidence that was completed earlier in the course, even if the student has performed less well in the later assessments?

Flexible arrangements have been put in place this summer and centres will 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 a specific subject.

Usually a student's most recent evidence is likely to be more representative of their performance. However, there may be specific, individual circumstances where that is not the case. When making a holistic judgement it is important to consider why a student's performance has declined. If the student has experienced adverse circumstances around a particular assessment, then the advice on how to apply special consideration to take account of this e.g. by substituting a piece of evidence, should be applied. If that is not the case, then it is advised that the teacher carefully evaluates the quality of the evidence, as outlined in step 3 on [page 22 of JCQ's guidance document](#). The teacher should consider the coverage of the assessment objectives, the content being assessed in the earlier and later assessment tasks, as well as the conditions under which the evidence was completed. When assigning the grade, the teacher should consider the quality of the work in relation to the assessment materials used as well as the grade descriptors and grading exemplification available to assist them in making their grading judgement.

When reviewing the evidence produced by students, a teacher discovers that a student has been assessed on content they had not been taught, what steps should they take?

Flexible arrangements have been put in place this summer and centres will 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. If a student has been given an assessment on content they have not been taught, the first step is to provide the student with an alternative assessment on the content they have been taught. This should be discussed with the student. If there are extenuating circumstances which means that the student is unable to undertake an alternative assessment, then the teacher can disregard the assessment evidence, and make a holistic judgement based on the other evidence the student has produced on the content they have been taught.

Special Consideration

What steps should a centre take when applying special consideration where a student has been affected by adverse circumstances at the time of the assessment(s) and most or all of the assessment evidence is affected?

The JCQ publication *A guide to the special consideration process* sets out examples of adverse circumstances which may affect candidates at the time of an assessment. Teachers must be satisfied that there has been a detrimental effect on the candidate's performance when making a judgement on the marks/grade to assign to individual assessments.

For the summer 2021 series, teachers must use a range of assessment evidence and assign an overall qualification grade which broadly reflects the level of performance the student has demonstrated through the assessment evidence they have produced.

In a year when examinations and assessments take place, teachers should remember that the special consideration process can only go some way to assist a candidate affected by a potentially wide range of difficulties which may have affected their performance. The difficulty faced by the candidate due to a temporary illness, a temporary injury or some other event outside of their control cannot be removed. Only relatively small adjustments can be made, however, as to make larger adjustments would jeopardise standards compared with previous years.

Where students are taking assessments under timed/controlled conditions this year, teachers should refer to page 6 of the JCQ publication *A guide to the special consideration process*. This provides examples of adverse circumstances that apply in a standard exam series. Teachers may use this as a guide when making judgements for students who have experienced adverse circumstances at the time of taking such assessments. A teacher should account for the adverse circumstance either at the assessment level, or when making their holistic grading judgement on the full range of evidence produced by the student.