

***OCR Guidance* on the determination of grades for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals for summer 2021**

**Processes to be adopted by centres
and support available from OCR**

OCR Guidance on the determination of grades for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals for summer 2021: processes to be adopted by centres and support available from OCR

Introduction

On 4 January 2021, the Government announced that it was no longer fair for the Summer 2021 examination series for GCSE, A/AS Level, Project Qualifications and Advanced Extension Award in maths to go ahead due to the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic. The government set out its policy that centres will be submitting students' grades in a letter dated 25 February 2021 (Direction from the Secretary of State for Education to Ofqual's Chief Regulator).

Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals qualifications are delivered alongside GCSEs and A levels. They are used interchangeably for progression to further study or employment; it is therefore appropriate that the approach we take to the awarding of grades for Cambridge Nationals and Technicals aligns as closely as possible to that being taken for general qualifications. Nevertheless, Cambridge Nationals and Technicals are different in structure and content, and this difference means that exact alignment of processes and guidance will not always be possible or appropriate.

We aim to be clear about where there is exact alignment for part of the process. Where this is the case, the guidance links to the appropriate section of the JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021. Where there is a difference we have provided detailed guidance in this document.

In developing this guidance, we have

- taken into consideration the needs of centres and teachers;
- ensured compliance with DfE directions and Ofqual requirements; and
- tried to minimise administrative burden for centres.

This guidance provides information in respect of the process, from the creation and submission of a Centre Policy, through the determination of grades, requirements for internal quality assurance procedures, submission of teacher assessed grades, the external quality assurance process, the issue of results and the appeals process for students.

If necessary, and dependent upon questions raised by centres, we will update this document. We will make sure these updates are clearly marked and widely communicated. This will be to clarify guidance if required, rather than change the guidance itself.

Some of this content outlined requires actions. There is also supporting advice, information and templates to make the submission of a Centre Policy straightforward. While some forms and templates in this guidance and the JCQ guidance that this document links to are optional, if not used, a similar approach to record keeping is required. We fully recognise the challenge of allocating grades to students this year and we hope this guidance, 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.

Scope of guidance

The scope of this guidance applies to all exam centres in England offering the following qualifications regulated by Ofqual:

- Cambridge Nationals
- Cambridge Technicals 2012 suite
- Cambridge Technicals 2016 Suite

This guidance also applies to centres in Wales and Northern Ireland who deliver Cambridge Nationals and Technicals.

Other essential documentation

While this guidance lays out the processes, information and support available to centres from OCR, it is important to also read and comply with relevant Ofqual regulations including:

- Guidance: Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades: summer 2021, Ofqual, 24 March 2021

Ofqual and Department for Education (England) Publications

This guidance was informed by a number of additional publications from the Department for Education and Ofqual. These are listed below for reference:

- Direction from the Secretary of State for Education to Ofqual's Chief Regulator, Department for Education, 25 February 2021
- Vocational and Technical qualifications contingency regulatory framework, Ofqual, 24 March 2021

Centres should consider the following additional guidance from Ofqual during the awarding of grades by teachers in 2021. This guidance is based on directions from the Secretary of State for Education to the Chief Regulator of Ofqual.

- Guidance: Information for centres about making objective judgements in relation to awarding qualifications in 2021, Ofqual March 2021 (Ofqual/21/6768/5)

Terminology

For clarity, the terminology used in this guidance document has been standardised. It is the same terminology as used in the JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021.

- *Awarding organisations*: this encompasses, 'exam boards' and 'awarding bodies'.
- *Assessment materials*: qualification-specific sets of questions covering key knowledge, understanding and skills, provided with mark schemes and mapping grids.
- *Centres*: these are exam centres approved in the National Centre Number register (NCNR).
- *Centre policy*: the policy sets out the processes centres will follow for determining grades, in an appropriate, consistent and fair way – only one will needed to be submitted for all awarding organisations.
- *Centre policy summary (form)*: this is an online webform to be completed on the JCQ Centre Admin Portal (CAP) summarising centre policy, which should also be uploaded when the form is completed – this needs to be completed only once for all awarding organisations unless information is missing or needs to be clarified.

- *Private candidates*: are students who have not studied with the exam centre that makes their entry.
- *SENCOs*: (Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators) this encompasses SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) leads in colleges and other relevant experts and assessors.
- *Students*: this means students entered for qualifications in 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 OCR do?

We will provide centres with a package of support materials to assist in the determination and submission of grades, provide contacts and answer queries. This will include questions, mark schemes, exemplar materials and grade descriptors.

Cambridge Nationals and Technicals will be covered by the Centre Policies to be produced by centres for General Qualifications. You do not need to complete a separate Centre Policy for Cambridge Nationals and Technicals (see section **centre policy guidance** below).

After the submission of grades, we will conduct a quality assurance exercise that will have elements of both targeted and random sampling of evidence and rationale for TAGs awarded for some candidates at some centres. Further information can be found in the quality assurance process (see section **the quality assurance process** below).

We may have further contact with our centres if, following any sampled quality assurance activity, we have concerns in relation to the teacher assessed grades submitted.

We are responsible for determining final grades and awarding qualifications. We will also manage the second stage of appeals. See [JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Appeals](#).

What will centres do?

Centres will create and submit a Centre Policy – a pre-populated template option is available (see [JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Additional Templates and Support Materials](#)).

This will:

- outline the roles and responsibilities of individuals in the centre;
- detail what training and support will be provided to centre 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 teacher 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.

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

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

Centres should ensure that students are aware of the evidence used to determine their grade and appropriately take into account any representations they make in relation to it. Although teachers may share results associated with individual pieces of evidence, they must not share with students the grades submitted to us before results are released.

Centres must submit teacher assessed grades us with a Head of Centre Declaration that confirms that the centre complied with its Centre Policy. We will provide a Declaration form and guidance on how to submit them along with information on grade submission. Note that Cambridge Nationals and Technicals are covered under the General Qualifications Centre Policy.

Centres will collaborate with us where external quality assurance sampling is required, which will include participating in a virtual visit.

Centres will release results to students for qualifications as required by the Department for Education on 10 August for Cambridge Technicals (Level 3 and Level 2 qualifications) and 12 August for Cambridge Nationals.

Centres will on request conduct the first stage of the appeals process, to check if an administrative or procedural error has occurred. Centres will also be required to submit second stage appeals to us 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. [See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Appeals.](#)

Timelines and key dates for students who are certificating in June 2021

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 centres

26 April: Entry deadline for private candidates

12 April to 30 April: Window for Centre Policy submission via proforma on CAP (Centre Admin Portal)

19 April to 11 June: Awarding organisations review Centre Policies and conduct virtual visits where needed

26 May to 18 June: Window for Teacher Assessed Grades Submission opens via awarding organisations' respective portals (OCR's Grade Submission System)

18 June to 16 July: Awarding organisations conduct sample checks of evidence

10 August: Cambridge Technicals (L3 and L2), A/AS Levels and relevant other Level 3 results

12 August: Cambridge Nationals, GCSEs and relevant other Level 2 results

10 August to 7 September: priority appeals window

17 August: deadline for students to request centre review

24 August: deadline for centres to submit appeals to us

10 August to end October: majority of non-priority appeals take place

3 September: deadline for students to request centre review

17 September: deadline for centres to submit appeals to us

We will provide more information and key dates and timeline for non-certificating students soon.

Where to get awarding organisation information support and guidance

OCR: ocr.org.uk/everything-you-need-to-know-for-summer-2021

Information on making entries for candidates certificating in summer 2021 for Cambridge Nationals is [here](#) and for Cambridge Technicals [here](#).

The quality assurance process

The quality assurance process for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals will align with the JCQ Guidance with one exception, see below.

Cambridge Nationals and Technicals will be covered by the Centre Policy ([see JCQ Guidance on Centre Policy Guidance](#)).

Internal quality assurance arrangements at your centre should follow the approach outlined in the [JCQ Guidance on The Quality Assurance Process](#).

The submission and quality assurance of Centre Policies will also follow the JCQ approach. You will only be required to submit one Centre Policy to cover Cambridge Nationals and Technicals and any General Qualifications that you offer. The JCQ Guidance on the External Quality Assurance Process, Stage 1 (Centre Policy review) and Stage 2 (Virtual Centre Visits) explains how Awarding Body quality assurance of the Centre Policy will work.

After teacher assessed grades have been submitted, we will conduct a third stage of quality assurance in the form of sampling of the evidence for some teacher assessed grades for some students and centres.

External quality assurance stage 3 – sampling of candidate evidence after centres have submitted TAGs

After your centre has submitted the teacher assessed grades for your students, we will conduct some further quality assurance in the form of sampling of evidence for some students from some centres. This will allow us to check that centres have implemented the approach that they outlined in their submitted centre policies. This stage of checking will also allow us to take a closer look at a sample of candidate evidence and the rationale for grades for any centres where the teacher assessed grades look very different from what we might expect based on historic entries and outcomes for the centre.

The sampling process will take place following the submission of grades by centres. Targeted sampling will be informed by:

- identification of any substantial divergence in the overall results profile for this year's cohort compared to the profiles for cohorts from previous years; and
- centres where additional support may be required.

In addition, some random sampling will take place.

When we collect the sample, we will review the evidence and grading rationale for an initial sample of students from a qualification. We will tell you which students' grades and evidence will be reviewed for a qualification. Subject specialists will carry out the review.

If we are going to sample evidence from your centre, we will ask to see the evidence and record of decision making for a sample of candidates from the cohort, from the top, middle, and bottom of the range of grades awarded. This will allow us to check evidence from across the grade range.

We will let you know shortly after 18 June (the deadline for submission of teacher assessed grades) if we will be asking you to submit evidence for sampling. If we will be sampling your cohort, we will

also tell you which candidates' evidence to submit. We will ask you to submit the evidence within a week of receiving the request. We will be providing further information soon about how to submit the evidence and will also tell you what you need to do if you experience any difficulties with this.

Our subject specialists will then review the evidence. In most cases, we will then contact you to say that we don't need to see anything further. If our subject specialists do have any concerns or feel that they need to see more evidence, then we will let you know that we need to undertake a further review. Where this is necessary, we will contact you to arrange a professional conversation between you and our subject specialist so that they can ask about the approach and rationale for the teacher assessed grades and can work with you to resolve any remaining issues.

In very rare cases, where it is not possible to resolve issues arising, we may need to withhold results pending further investigation.

We will give you more detailed information about timelines and how to submit evidence for sampling soon.

Centre policy guidance

See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, *Centre Policy Guidance*.

If you do not have any GCSE, AS or A level entries with any awarding organisations, we will contact you about how you are to submit your Centre Policy, your Centre Policy Summary and the Head of Centre Declaration.

Guidance on grading

Determining your grades for Cambridge Technical and Cambridge Nationals

For your students who are due to complete a Cambridge National or Cambridge Technical qualification in summer 2021, you will make a holistic judgement based on the evidence you have of each student's performance in the subject to determine a teacher assessed grade (TAG) for the qualification. You should assign a TAG using the normal grading scale for the qualification, informed by the grade descriptors and grade exemplar materials. There are no constraints on the minimum number of units or percentage of the qualification which a student must have been taught, as long as the grade is based on evidence of their performance. You should make sure that you have taught as much content as you need to make a judgement about a grade.

The evidence you use:

- can be of different types
- can come from across the course of study
- can vary between your learners on the same course, depending on what they managed to achieve

This guidance takes you through the grading decisions step by step and outlines different factors for you to consider. Some of these steps may run at the same time.

Step 1: What have you taught your students?

Looking at the specification you've been teaching, consider:

- what have you taught?
- has what you have taught been covered deeply or superficially because of the impact of the pandemic? Which topics have you taught in depth and which did you intend to revisit?

- Which topics have you not been able to teach to your students because of the impact of the pandemic?

The evidence used to make your judgement should only include assessment of the knowledge, skills and understanding that has been taught.

Step 2: What evidence should I collect?

Consider what evidence of student performance you may have collected over the course of study. This evidence can include:

- Student work produced in response to assessment materials we have provided, including groups of questions, past papers or similar materials such as practice or sample papers.
- Banked units (i.e. external exams or moderated assessments that we have graded).
- Internal assessments that have been completed but not OCR moderated, or that have been partially completed.
- Student work produced in centre-devised tasks that reflects the specification, follows the same format as our exam board materials and has been marked in a way that reflects our exam board mark schemes. This can include:
 - Homework or classwork where the student practises a task
 - Project work
 - Recordings (e.g. of practical performance).
- Evidence from work experience where relevant to the qualification.
- Tracker of achievement and attainment over the course. This cannot be used in isolation, as by itself it would not support the external quality assurance process/appeal review.
- Witness testimonies or teacher observation records in a form which would normally be submitted for moderation.

Retention of evidence

You need to retain a copy of the student work you have used as evidence. Where this isn't possible (for example because it was from earlier in the course and evidence was not retained at that point), then a record of the mark can still be used in determining the final grade. If a student decides to appeal their result, copies of the evidence that is available can be considered by OCR. The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has published [guidance on the retention of work](#).

You must retain the evidence which is used to support a Teacher Assessed Grade until 6 months after the date of the issue of the result, or the conclusion of any appeal in relation to that result, whichever is later.

Extra factors for you to consider when you are collecting evidence

- Private candidates, or students who have moved schools, are likely to have evidence produced with a tutor or other educational provider. You can use any evidence that is available from these sources that you are able to authenticate as the student's own work.
- The evidence you collect **must** relate to the qualification and specification being assessed.

- You don't need to assess all areas of the specification to arrive at a grade. You should aim to include evidence that assesses the student's ability across a reasonable range of subject content over as much as they have been taught, reflecting, where possible:
 - recall, select and apply knowledge and understanding
 - present information, using terminology
 - apply knowledge, understanding and skills to plan (investigations and/or tasks)
 - review evidence and make judgements (the evidence being reviewed could be based on their own or others work).

Additionally:

- There is no requirement for any units to have been fully taught or assessed
- There are no additional restrictions on the number of pieces of evidence, or number of different types of evidence.
- You should use evidence which demonstrates students' achievements fully, to make sure that their grade represents their performance.
- Part of the evidence of student work that you collect **must** be in a tangible form that can be reviewed by others, such as written work or audio/visual recordings. This is so that sampling (which is part of the external quality assurance process) and review (which is as part of the potential appeals process) could take place if required in exceptional cases.
- Consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support your judgement. If not, what additional assessment evidence might be needed? You could use the assessment materials provided by OCR to supplement or help to confirm performance of previous assessments.
- If you provide additional opportunities for individual students to produce evidence, then you should consider whether you should make these assessment opportunities available for the whole cohort.
- You will need to communicate the details of what evidence you use to make your judgement/grading decision to each student so they know what evidence you will use. Informing students about what evidence is going to be used will help them to understand the process.

Step 3: How can I evaluate the quality of the evidence?

To check the quality of the evidence, you should consider:

- Coverage of knowledge, skills and understanding – What is covered?
- Authenticity – How confident are you that it is 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 to help you in applying the mark scheme? What internal standardisation processes have been applied?
- Were students able to demonstrate their achievements fully, showing the full range of their performance?

There is no ranking of evidence by type. Evidence that you believe is an authentic representation of the student's performance will give you confidence in your overall holistic judgement. In most cases, more recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance, although there may be exceptions.

Step 4: Is the range of evidence appropriate for all my students?

You should normally aim to gather the same range of evidence for all students in a class or cohort. However, the range of evidence that you collect may not be the same for all your students because there may be some variability due to the impact of the pandemic on teaching, learning and assessment. For example, some students may have missed a section of teaching due to illness. If this is the case, you should choose the most appropriate evidence for each student and make sure that your choice does not advantage or disadvantage any students because they have been affected differently by the pandemic.

You can only grade each student on their performance based on the subject content they have been taught. Before finalising your decisions, check that each student has been taught the content for the evidence you plan to use. If there are any differences between a student and the rest of their cohort in what has been taught, this should become apparent before decisions are finalised.

Step 5: How do I assign a grade?

Grades should be based on a holistic judgement based on a range of appropriate evidence of the student's performance on the knowledge, skills and understanding they have been taught for the qualification. To help you reach a final grade:

- Look at the qualities of the work you have collected and use the sources of support available. This will include your professional experience of the assessment materials used as well as the grade descriptors and exemplification that we have also provided to support your decision making.
- Your grade must be based on your student's performance in the evidence you have collected, and what the student has been taught, not on the student's potential. For example, if all the evidence collected is of Pass and Merit standard, you should not consider awarding that student a Distinction grade. It should be no easier or more difficult for a student to achieve a grade based on their performance than in previous years when exams were taken.
- If a student has 'banked' some units, the grade which they received for those units should not be a cap on the final grade you give them if there is other evidence of stronger achievement. For example, if a unit were taken early in a course of study, a student may have improved their performance during their course. You should include a rationale for how you have used banked evidence.
- It is appropriate to award a U grade if a student does not have evidence of achievement at a Pass grade.
- You must record your decision-making process about the evidence you have included and the grade that you have reached, in accordance with the school's quality assurance processes.

Equality and avoiding discrimination

- Your judgements about your students' grades should be objective and avoid unconscious bias. Ofqual has produced some information in relation to awarding qualifications in 2021 here. We will keep you updated with more.
- Grades may then be adjusted as part of the school's or college's quality assurance processes, including internal standardisation arrangements.
- Access arrangements should have been in place when evidence was generated. Where they were not, you should take that into account when coming to your judgement. This could include input from appropriate specialist teachers and other professionals.
- If a student is unable to take an assessment or suffers a traumatic event that might affect their performance, Special Consideration will not apply this summer 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, you should bear that in mind when making your judgement. You may wish to give a student another opportunity to generate the evidence.

We have provided worked examples to assist teachers in making grading decisions: these provide a number of scenarios to assist teachers to arrive at a fair grade.

Guidance for your students who are not certificating in summer 2021

Please note that for students who are not due to complete their Cambridge National or Cambridge Technical qualification in summer 2021, we have provided a separate and detailed set of FAQs about teacher assessed grades (TAGs). For these students you should determine a teacher assessed grade for the units which they were due to take in summer 2021. **These apply to the units where you had planned that students would be working on the assessment by the end of the summer term in 2021. You can still submit a TAG where this is the case, even if you would not have planned to submit those assessments to us for moderation until the next academic year. You will need to make unit entries for these students.**

Overall, the process for determining a unit level TAG for your non-certificating students is very similar to qualification level TAGs:

- Students receiving unit level TAGs should not be advantaged or disadvantaged compared to students who received a qualification level TAG.
- The grade should be based on evidence.
- Your starting point should be evidence which relates directly to that unit. However, if there is evidence of higher achievement from other units, then this may be used as well.

Please see our detailed FAQs.

Using grade descriptors and grading exemplars

This section explains how to use grade descriptors when you are making student performance judgements.

You should use the Grade Descriptors with the Grading Exemplars. We have produced Grading Exemplars for each specification. We will publish the Grading Exemplars by 19 April 2021.

You should use the descriptors and exemplification to make **holistic** judgements about student performance.

Where to get further support

You should use this document with:

- [How to determine your grades for Cambridge Technical and Cambridge Nationals](#).
- Grading exemplars for your qualification.

Any teacher may also contact us directly for further help. Our Customer Support Centre is here to support you on 01223 553998 or support@ocr.org.uk

The grade descriptors

Grade descriptors are general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics.

We have created exemplars for each specification. The exemplars use student work to illustrate the

grade descriptors, and provide an explanation of how the work meets the grade descriptors. The exemplars should be available from 19 April 2021.

The descriptors will help you place student performance relative to the performance standards set for Summer 2021. The performance standards for Summer 2021 are the same as previous years where an examination series took place. You should also use these grade descriptors and exemplars for unit level TAGs for non-certificating students. Please note that we will not ask you to submit unit level TAGs until the autumn.

What grade descriptors exist?

Grade descriptors have been created for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals. They describe **mid-grade performance**.

Cambridge Nationals: there are grade descriptors for D2, P2, D1, P1.

Cambridge Technicals: there are grade descriptors for Distinction, Merit and Pass.

Using the descriptors

Grade descriptors will help you to identify:

- The performance characteristics within a piece of evidence
- A potential grade band for a collection of evidence

You should be familiar with the evidence from your students before using grade descriptors.

You should use the **grade descriptor and grading exemplars** to support decision making.

The process

These grade descriptors do not highlight performance characteristics for all grades. You are free to award teacher assessed grades from the whole range of grades available. For example, if a student's performance is stronger than the grade descriptors for a Pass grade but do not fully meet the grade descriptors for a Distinction, then you should consider awarding a Merit.

Review your evidence. Read through the grade descriptors. Match the evidence to the suitable statements within the grade descriptors.

You may find that evidence covers more than one grade descriptor. You should make a **holistic** grade judgement which may be a 'best fit' approach.

For example, if you have evidence for a student that contains:

- Many characteristics of a Merit response
- A few characteristics of a Pass response
- A single characteristic of a Distinction response.

Choosing either a Merit or a Pass will be most suitable for this set of evidence. As there are more Merit characteristics, settling on a Merit is likely to be the most appropriate.

Remember that grades should be based on a holistic judgement. You should judge grades based on the subject content which your students have been taught.

Your final decisions will rely on your professional judgement and experience.

Using data to support the grading process

Introduction

Used appropriately, data on historical student and centre 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 centre's outcomes this summer, but as one source of evidence from examination series which operated as normal, that can inform your professional judgement on the level of attainment achieved by your students.

Accordingly, you should consider the profile of your results in previous years **in which exams have taken place**, as outlined in Ofqual's *[Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades: summer 2021](#)*. You can use this to undertake a high-level check once grades have been assigned to students, to ensure that you have applied a consistent standard in their assessment of the 2021 cohort compared to previous years in which exams took place.

You 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 centre.

If you are taking a qualification for the first time in 2021, you will not have any historical data, so you will need to focus attention on other aspects of quality assurance. If your centre has changed status, merged, or split in recent years, you will need to take this into account when considering what data to collate.

The use of data in reviewing overall centre outcomes

You should be aware of the distribution of your students' grades awarded to students in previous June series. However, your grading judgements should not be driven by this data. You should only consider historical grade data after you have made your grading judgements.

What data should you consider?

We advise you to compile information on the grades awarded to students in past June series in which exams took place (2017 to 2019), where you can be confident that the normal standard was used in awarding. You should consider the following factors:

- The size of your cohort from year to year – the larger the cohort, the more useful the data could be.
- The stability of your centre's overall grade outcomes for the qualification from year to year – the more stable the outcomes are, the more confident you can be that variation would likely be low in 2021, had exams taken place.

If your centre has taken on private candidates in previous series, and/or in the current series, they should be excluded from this data.

You may find it helpful to look at your centre's outcomes over a three-year period in which exams took place (2017 to 2019), at subject This will help when considering year-on-year fluctuations in outcomes. If you have fewer years of historical data, however, this is still likely to be useful.

The June 2020 series should not be used for benchmarking purposes unless you were offering the qualification for the first time in 2020. The centre assessment grades used as a basis for final outcomes in June 2020 were based on a different consideration to that for the current series. In June 2020, centres were asked to provide the grade that they considered the student would most likely have achieved had exams taken place – a prediction. In 2021, grades must be based on the evidence produced by students. You should therefore be careful when using 2020 data.

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

After all grading decisions have been made, you should review the aggregate cumulative grade distribution for each subject. This is an overall 'common-sense' check of outcomes. If outcomes are much higher than in previous years, or much lower, you should consider why this might be. There may be good reasons for any changes. You could identify evidence for any recurring trends in the profile of performance at the centre over previous years, such as strong results for some subjects or specific student groups. You should contextualise any comparisons with other information at centre level, for example data that suggests the cohort in a particular subject, or overall, is more or less able than in previous years – for example, tracking data, prior assessment data, or a change in the profile of the cohort.

You should also consider the grades awarded to different groups of students, including those with protected personal 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.

We advise that you keep 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 during any external quality assurance checks.

It is possible that, following this review, that you may need to reflect on the grading standard that your teachers have applied in one or more subjects. **At all times, however, remember that it is the evidence of students' work that must form the basis for each student's grade. Do not change grades only on the basis of the data comparison.** For example, the fact that no student at a centre might have achieved a Distinction, 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

If you are selected for a quality assurance visit, you may be asked to provide a statement explaining the rationale of the outcomes by subject. This must include details of how your students' grades compare with previous series, and an explanation for this – for example, if your centre's cohort were known to be particularly strong or weak relative to previous years; any changes at your centre that might have contributed to the level of attainment achieved by students, or the size of the cohort means that comparisons between years are considered unreliable.

Guidance on the use of additional assessment materials

Introduction

We will provide a suite of additional assessment materials for use in summer 2021. These materials are one part of the range of evidence which teachers use to determine a grade for each student. **Use of these materials is optional** and you may decide how much to rely on these materials to inform your decision making. They are intended for use to plug gaps in demonstrated knowledge or to validate a previous assessment. If you already have appropriate assessment evidence from the course, there is no need to replace this with new evidence.

We will make the assessment materials available to centres by 31 March 2021, with the support materials available by 12 April. They may be used at any point from 31 March until the date when grades are submitted to us. You should ensure that there is sufficient time built in to follow your centre's internal quality assurance processes before your grades are submitted to the exam board and 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 Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals.
- They are drawn from a variety of exam questions, from a range of papers; they do not cover any moderated units.
- The number, breadth and depth of the material will vary between subjects, and reflect the characteristics of each qualification. However, they will draw on the equivalent of 3 series' worth of exam material.
- Additional support materials will also be provided. The number and nature of these support materials will correspond to the number, breadth and depth of the assessment materials as per the above. The additional support will include mark schemes (available by 31 March) and links to other information which will help with using and marking these assessment materials (available by 12 April).

We will also provide a guidance document by 31 March which will map Learning Outcome coverage, content and/or skills covered within each set of questions and also direct teachers to where the question originally came from to allow them to access further support materials. This document will also indicate where pre-existing modified versions of items are available from us (see later section on modifying material).

What is their purpose?

These assessment materials are an optional part of the range of evidence you will use to decide on each student's grade. They are made up of a mix of past material (both published and unpublished) and may include new material where required. We will present them in a different format to make them more flexible and adaptable to enable you to select appropriate content to use with your students. Use of these assessment materials will assist you in assessing students' performance in areas not assessed elsewhere. Their use will also provide an opportunity for students to demonstrate their performance at the end of their course of study.

How and when should I use them?

You may use these materials in a variety of ways, at any point after they are released. For example, you could set these materials as a test or as a class or homework activity. However, you should remember that if the work is going to contribute towards your determination of a student's grade, you must be confident it represents the student's own, unaided work.

In particular you can use them to:

- give students the opportunity to show what they know, understand or can do in an area of content you have taught but not yet assessed.
- give students an opportunity to show improvement e.g. to validate or replace an existing piece of evidence.
- support consistency of judgement between teachers or classes within your centre by giving everyone the same task to complete.

You may choose which assessment materials to use and whether they should be used in the form provided or tailored to better match the content you have taught. You decide which activities should be completed and set the task, collect the student work and mark it using the accompanying marking scheme and drawing on other available marking support material where provided. Departments and centres should have arrangements in place to ensure consistent application of the marking schemes.

Whilst the materials have been provided as groups of questions, you have the option to tailor these materials in line with the content you have taught. You may combine different materials together, and/or remove elements you don't need for your cohort/class. For example, if a multi-part question includes a part which focuses on an element of the specification you haven't covered, you may remove that part of the question and reduce the marks available accordingly.

Once you've marked your students' work, if you have reason to believe an outcome doesn't reflect a student's usual level of performance – for example because of the conditions the student completed the work in – you don't have to include the outcome in your range of evidence. You could use other evidence, or give them another opportunity to complete a different piece of work. You should refer to the [overarching grading guidance](#) to help you decide whether you have sufficient evidence to award a grade reliably.

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. You could set a group of questions as a classroom test, or as homework for example. You may need to administer these activities remotely, for example if a student is self-isolating or conditions require it. You can supervise an assessment remotely should you need to. These are flexible activities, but you should consider your students' results in the light of the conditions in which the activity was completed. If you set an activity to be completed under your supervision, you know how long a student has spent on the task, what materials have helped them and whether they have received any additional support.

You should also consider students' normal access arrangements when you set work, especially if you set it to be taken under timed, test conditions.

What if students have seen some of this material before?

You should think about the purpose of any material before you use it in the range of evidence. 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.

You do not need to keep these materials securely (like you would an exam paper) but you need to think about whether you want students to know what activity they will complete in advance, or whether you want them to complete it as an unseen test. Additionally, if you want all students in a cohort to sit the same activity in test conditions, you should ensure this happens on the same day to maximise fairness for all students.

What support materials will be provided?

We will provide mark schemes to help teachers mark student answers. We will provide additional support materials to accompany the assessment material and mark schemes. We will also publish subject specific mapping guidance, showing which materials match which topics from the specification, or which Learning Objectives, as relevant to the qualification. Material will be grouped in different ways and could be presented by topic, text, theme, exam section or Learning Objective coverage for example.

Support materials may also include:

- past examiner reports
- marked examples of candidate work from past papers where they exist and support the marking of student work
- data on past performance.

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 you to turn the mark from an assessment into a grade and the mark should be considered alongside other pieces of evidence. You should consider what gap in the range of evidence you are filling by using this material. For example, you could refer to the grade descriptors for your subject and target a particular aspect of the grade descriptor to assure yourself of the appropriateness of your grading decision for your students. This would be particularly relevant if you have taught an area of the specification referenced in the descriptor, but you do not yet have evidence of the students' learning in this area.

Reasonable adjustments, access arrangements and special considerations

See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Reasonable adjustments, access arrangements and special considerations.

Submission of grades

Students certificating in summer 2021

For students certificating for Cambridge Nationals and Technicals in June 2021, please follow the JCQ guidance on submission of grades. See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Submission of Grades.

Students who are not certificating in summer 2021

For students who will not be certificating this summer, we will be asking centres to submit unit level teacher assessed grades in the autumn and will be providing further information about the process for doing this soon. Please see arrangements for Cambridge Nationals and Cambridge Technicals students not certificating in summer 2021.

Guidance for exam centres accepting private candidates

See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Guidance for Exam Centre Accepting Private Candidates.

Malpractice

See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, Malpractice.

Results

The dates for the publication of results are being brought forward this summer.

This will see Cambridge Technicals and Cambridge Nationals results being published in the same week.

Cambridge Technicals (L3 and L2)

- Results will be released to centres on Monday 9 August 2021.
- Students will receive their results on Tuesday 10 August 2021.

Cambridge Nationals

- Results will be released to centres on Wednesday 11 August 2021.
- Students will receive their results on Thursday 12 August 2021.

Appeals

See JCQ Guidance on Determination of grades for A/AS levels and GCSEs for summer 2021, *Appeals*.

Additional templates and support materials

A range of materials and templates are also being made available to assist centres and will be downloadable from the JCQ website at: Summer 2021 arrangements – JCQ Joint Council for Qualifications. The following of these documents are relevant for Cambridge Nationals and Technicals:

- Centre policy for awarding teacher assessed grades: whilst using this template is not compulsory, it is highly recommended as otherwise centres will need to prepare their own complete Centre Policy, which is a requirement.
- Centre policy summary form (this is required and must be submitted as part of external quality assurance).
- Head of Centre declaration (this is required, this must be submitted by all centres as part of quality assurance).
- Head of Department checklist/declaration (this is optional but if this template is not used then the same information must still be recorded).

We have provided worked examples to assist teachers in making grading decisions: these provide a number of scenarios to assist teachers to arrive at a fair grade.

A list of the information that should be included in the record of decision making is provided.