



Standardising grades in summer 2020

Although exams have been cancelled because of coronavirus, most students will receive calculated grades this summer, meaning they can progress to further study or employment as planned.

This fact sheet for centres & stakeholders answers some common questions about the standardisation process this year.

We have provided more detailed information in our [guidance document](#) and [videos](#).

Schools and colleges have provided to exam boards a centre assessment grade for each student in every GCSE, AS or A level subject they planned to take this summer, and a rank order of students by their expected performance.

The circumstances meant teachers were not given an opportunity to develop a common approach to grading in advance; and it is likely that some centres may be more generous in their judgements, and others more severe. To make sure standards are aligned across schools and colleges, all grades will be standardised by exam boards, using a model developed by Ofqual.

The model will ensure that national results are broadly in line with those in previous years. It will consider each centre individually, comparing centre assessment grades to the centre's historical results taking into account the prior attainment of the current students, to judge whether its centre assessment grades are more generous or severe than predicted. If grading judgements in a school or college appear severe or generous, exam boards will adjust the grades of some or all of those students upwards or downwards accordingly, using the rank order. This will have the effect of amending the centre assessment grades to align them with the predicted grade distribution.

Such adjustments will bring consistency to judgements between different schools and colleges, so that universities, colleges and employers can be confident this year's results carry the same value, and students can compete on a level playing field for opportunities with students from previous and future years.

We have extensively tested the model to ensure that as far as possible it gives students fair and accurate results and that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged on the basis of their socio-economic background or particular protected characteristics.

Students will be able to appeal – through their school or college – if they believe the process this summer was not followed correctly in their case; and centres themselves can appeal if they believe something systemic has gone wrong in relation to their results. Any student who would like to improve their grade in a subject will have an opportunity to take exams in the autumn. Exams in the full suite of GCSE, AS and A level will be available.



How will the standardisation process work?

For each centre in every subject, exam boards will use historical performance data to determine the proportion of students achieving each grade in previous years. They will check this against prior attainment data for this year's students compared to the prior attainment of candidates making up the historical data. Depending on their ability, the predicted grade distribution for the centre in the subject might be adjusted upwards or downwards. Exam boards will then overlay the centre's rank order of students onto the predicted grade distribution and allocate grades to students, without changing the rank order. This will have the effect of amending the centre assessment grades in order to align with the predicted grade distribution - meaning that, for some students, the grade they are allocated will not be the same as the centre assessment grade that was submitted.

Before results are issued, exam boards will also work alongside Ofqual to compare the results from applying this process nationally with those from previous years – to check they are not too generous or too severe overall.

What data will the standardisation process use?

Standardisation will draw on the following sources of data: the historical outcomes for each centre; the prior attainment of this year's students and those in previous years in each centre (based on Key Stage 2 for GCSE or GCSE data for AS and A level); and the prior attainment of all students taking a subject this year. The process will consider prior attainment at centre level, not at individual student level; students' individual performance will not be predetermined by their prior attainment at Key Stage 2 or GCSE.

For AS and A levels, the process will consider historical data from 2017, 2018 and 2019. For GCSEs, it will consider data from 2018 and 2019, except where there is only a single year of data from the reformed specifications. The process will accommodate students without prior attainment data, centres without historical outcomes in a subject and centres which have included private candidates within the information they have submitted.

Will the standardisation process take into account any change in centre performance?

For the vast majority of schools and colleges any year-on-year variation in results for a given subject is quite small, with small changes up and down seen. The lack of stability over a 3-year period in improvements or deteriorations in performance for the overwhelming majority of centres means that any statistical model is likely to be unacceptably unreliable in predicting any trends in performance in 2020. For this reason, the trajectory of schools and college results will not be taken into account in the standardisation process.



Will the standardisation process work differently for different sizes of centre or entry?

The standardisation process will be sensitive to the fact that centres with smaller entries – because of their centre size or subject cohort – usually see more year-on-year variation in results than in centres with larger entries. Centres with smaller entries will have greater weight placed upon the centre assessment grades when calculating results. We do not have one cut-off point to define a ‘small entry’ in a subject – instead, the process will use a sliding scale to adjust the weighting given to the centre assessment grade or statistical evidence depending on the number of students taking a subject at a centre.

The process will only place more weight on the statistical evidence than the centre assessment grades where we believe it will increase the likelihood of students getting the grades they would have likely achieved had they taken exams in 2020.

Will the standardisation process disadvantage higher attaining students in centres with previously lower performance?

Standardisation will draw on the historical outcomes of a centre as well as the prior performance of students in this year’s cohort. Where the prior attainment of students in a subject for a centre is higher this year, the process will take this into account.

We recognise there will be students who may have achieved grades which were higher (or lower) than the calculated grades they will receive this summer, if the exams had taken place. Students who do not feel their calculated grades reflect their likely performance will have an opportunity to sit exams in the autumn. If they choose to do so, they will be able to use the higher of the 2 grades for future progression.

How will the standardisation process affect students with protected characteristics?

We take seriously concerns about the potential for unconscious bias to inadvertently affect centre assessment grades and rank orders of students. We considered these carefully when developing the standardisation process – carefully testing a range of models and selecting the one which most accurately predicts student grades. The model we have selected is the fairest possible in the circumstances and will ensure, so far as possible, that students are not advantaged or disadvantaged on the basis of their socio-economic background or particular protected characteristics.

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