

This guide covers information you may want to know about assessment and awarding of GCSEs, AS qualifications and A levels in England this summer.

July 2013

What's happening when?

The exam period for GCSEs, AS qualifications and A levels finished on 26th June. Exam results and grades for AS qualifications and A levels will be issued on 15th August, and GCSE exam results and grades will be issued on 22nd August.

What has changed?

GCSE English and English language

Following the difficulties last year with awarding GCSEs in English and English language, we have put in place additional controls to strengthen these GCSEs. The moderation tolerance for written controlled assessment was tightened from November 2012 onwards. January 2013 exams and controlled assessments were marked but not graded, so the grade boundaries for January and June will be set at the same time this summer. We have also consulted on future changes to speaking and listening, so that assessment results would not contribute to the overall grade. We will publish the results of this consultation later this year. We will let schools and colleges know about any changes before the start of the autumn term.

Spelling, punctuation and grammar

Since January 2013, students studying GCSEs in English literature, geography, history and religious studies have been assessed on spelling, punctuation and grammar (SPaG). SPaG will account for five per cent of the marks in these qualifications.

GCSE science

In summer 2013, new GCSE qualifications in additional science, additional applied

science, biology, chemistry and physics will be awarded for the first time. These new specifications are more demanding than those they replaced.

These changes were made so that the GCSEs adequately test breadth and depth of knowledge. The changes mean that students need to perform at a higher standard to achieve the same grades. For this reason, schools and colleges may see greater variation in their results, and individual schools and colleges may not do as well as in previous years.

What else is changing?

GCSEs

From next school year, GCSE students will have to take their assessments at the end of the course. Students who started studying GCSEs in September 2012 will only be assessed in summer 2014. There will be one re-sit opportunity for English, English literature and maths each November.

A levels

From September 2013, students will no longer be able to sit A level exams in January. This change was introduced given evidence about the impact of multiple resits.

Longer term

We are currently consulting (<http://comment.ofqual.gov.uk/gcse-reform-june-2013/>) on longer term changes to GCSEs. Changes will also be made to A levels starting from 2015, with a separate AS and new content where necessary. A timeline of changes to GCSEs and A levels can be found here: www.ofqual.gov.uk/qualifications-and-assessments/qualification-reform

How are grades awarded?

Each exam board holds awarding meetings (face to face or online) at the end of the exam series. An awarding committee is chaired by a chair of examiners who is responsible for the standards in the subject. The experts on the awarding committee recommend grade boundaries for each unit using a combination of statistical evidence and professional judgement, so that standards are comparable year on year. The boundaries can and do differ across exam series, because exam papers differ. Unit outcomes can only be combined to issue a qualification grade once a student has completed the entire course.

For more about awarding go to www.ofqual.gov.uk/help-and-advice/about-marking-and-grading/

How to help a student who has a problem with their exam grade

If you are asked to help a student who believes they have the wrong grade, they should speak first to their school or college exams officer who can submit an enquiry about results. If a university place is at risk, the exams officer must submit a Priority Service Request. This year, the deadline for the Priority Service Request is 23rd August, and the enquiry about results deadline is 20th September.

An enquiry about results can include a clerical check or a re-mark of an exam paper. If the school or college is still not happy, they can appeal to the exam board. If the school or college is still not satisfied after the appeal, they can make a case to the Examinations Procedures Review Service, which we run.

If you are asked to help a student who is not happy with the mark they have for coursework and controlled assessment, they should first appeal to their school or college who may agree to review the marking.

Exam boards check a sample of school and college marking of coursework and controlled assessment. This is known as moderation. Moderation checks that marks are awarded appropriately and are consistent with marking guidance. An exams officer can request re-moderation of the sample on behalf of a student, but if re-moderation takes place, all the work from that school or college must be checked, not just the work of the individual student. Your constituents should note that marks can go up, down, or stay the same from enquiry about results and re-moderation.

Who's who in exams?

Ofqual – regulates qualifications and assessments in England and vocational qualifications in Northern Ireland. www.ofqual.gov.uk - 0300 303 3346 - info@ofqual.gov.uk

Exam boards – design and deliver qualifications. For GCSEs and A levels in England the exam boards are:

AQA – www.aqa.org.uk

Pearson – www.edexcel.com

OCR – www.ocr.org.uk

WJEC – www.wjec.co.uk

JCQ – the Joint Council for Qualifications provides administrative arrangements for exams and assessments in school. www.jcq.org.uk

The Examinations Procedures Review Service, which we run, acts as the final stage of an enquiries and appeals process for schools and colleges. www.ofqual.gov.uk/complaints-and-appeals/exam-results-appeals/