



SSAT A-level policy update

12 August 2020

Tom Middlehurst, Head of Policy and Public Affairs

PLEASE NOTE THE UPDATE WILL START AT 16.00

- There will not be any sound until 16.00, so don't worry if you can't hear anything before then!
- All participants' mics are muted to limit background noise
- Please use the chat function to ask questions / make comments throughout the update

Does your data reflect national data?

- CAGs were 12pp higher than previous years – an unprecedented rise
- C. 60% of CAGs are unchanged through standardisation
- C. 40% of CAGs have been moved, mostly down by one grade
- Some instances of grades changed from C to U
- Big differences between exam boards
- Students don't yet know their CAGs
- Early anecdotal reports that disadvantaged and BAME students have been affected more than their peers through standardisation
- Ofqual have not confirmed if they will release data on the impact on disadvantage

11.30, Tuesday 11 August

- Gavin Williamson announced that mock grades could be used if students are unhappy with their calculated grades
- No proposal to use CAGs instead of mock grades
- No detail in announcement on how this would work, how mock grades will be validated
- National headlines announce that mocks can be used

6am, Wednesday 12 August

- DfE release more details that 'valid' mock grades can be used as part of an appeals process
- Described as a **triple-lock** – students will keep their best of 1. calculated grade, 2. valid mock grade made through appeal (or other grade rise through appeals), 3. grade received in autumn 2020 or summer 2021
- But no details about what 'valid' means yet

2.30pm, Wednesday 12 August

“However, we understand why the government has wanted to provide some additional assurance for students, by confirming that evidence from valid mock exams can be considered as part of an appeal. We are working urgently to operationalise this as fairly as possible and to determine what standards of evidence will be required for the appeal. We will provide more detail early next week.”

The problems with mocks

- Used inconsistently across the system
- Teachers may tactically offer inflated grades to boost confidence / harsher grades to challenge (a students' target grade is often higher than a realistic prediction to include stretch)
- May not be full subject content, under the same conditions
- Many schools use past papers which are available online and are often used by private tutors
- Schools have not been required to log mock grades formally. How will they evidence how rigorous a mock series was?
- It massively disadvantages schools who don't do mocks, or who only provide formative feedback
- Undermines the CAG process

So what's a 'valid' mock?

- The paper, the whole paper and nothing but the paper??
- Exam conditions??
- One sitting??
- Assessment and moderation??
- Papers available online??
- Recorded how? Monitored how??
- Taken when??

The one thing we do know, is that no school can reliably tell a student tomorrow that their mock grade is 100% valid, as we simply don't know the criteria yet

Does it change anything?

- In someways, no. There had already been changes made to the appeals process during the summer break so that schools can appeal if they can prove the standardisation model doesn't work for their cohort
- However, it opens up another vehicle for appeals and may encourage students / parents to pursue appeals they may not have done
- Therefore increased workload for schools – having to decide whether a mock grade can be considered 'valid' – whatever that means
- But biggest challenge may be perception of students and parents

National headlines

Guardian

'Ministers bid to quell revolt over England A-levels by allowing mock exam results'

Mail

'Shambles as government lets students pick their own grades ... pupils can CHOOSE between mock results and predicted grades'

Telegraph

'Students told they can choose mock results in last minute change'

Key points to remind students, parents and carers

- Not all mock results will be valid. It depends on how they were taken and how they were used. This is no reflection on you as a school. Exam-style mocks are not mandatory.
- CAGs took into account any mock results, along with more evidence. Most students will receive their CAG or one grade lower
- **Even** if students don't get what they hoped, and even if they don't meet their uni entry requirements, unis have confirmed they will be flexible
- If a student gets into their first choice uni, it is time to focus on that, prepare for the autumn term. Appeals and resits are not useful. Focus on progression.
- Students and parents cannot appeal a grade themselves. Only the school can decide.

Results day – key processes

- Students receive calculated grades
- If they have not met entry requirements, they should contact their first choice uni asap. Talk to their subject teachers about what evidence they can provide that they were working at a higher standard
- If they fail to get in, they may want to consider one of the routes to appeal – although this is ultimately up to you as a school whether you feel there is a case
- If not, they have the option to sit exams in the autumn or summer
- They retain the best grade of the three, the so-called ‘triple lock’

Appeals process – what we already knew

- Schools can appeal if something has gone wrong in processing the results – either on the school's end or the exam board's.
- Appeals must come from schools, not students
- Students cannot appeal their CAG or rank order

Appeals process – update on 6 August

- Schools can now appeal if they can **evidence** that grades are lower than expected because previous cohorts aren't representative of this year's cohorts and so standardisation doesn't work
- E.g.s given: a single-sex school changes to co-ed; a centre has a significant change in leadership; the school experienced a monumental event in a previous year; where a school has outlying students who fall outside the statistical model.
- But, this has to be evidenced using statistical data to show the change would be substantive. In itself, a change is not enough

Appeals process – today's announcement

- A student could request the school to appeal their calculated grade if they have a 'valid mock grade' that is higher
- (No information yet about what constitutes valid)
- Ultimately up to the school to decide, when the valid criteria is published, whether the mock result in question would be valid
- Worth keeping in mind that the message about mocks that was given to students may not always be the reality (e.g. paper sat not in exam conditions / sat over two sittings / content not covered yet removed, etc)

Data, confidentiality and subject requests

- The language of 'downgrading' in the media is unhelpful. The grades have not been downgraded as such
- Calculated grades were ALWAYS going to be a combination of CAG, rank order, and standardisation
- When students receive their results tomorrow, they won't know whether their CAG has been changed or not
- After results, you can release CAGs and rank order

Options for CAG data release

1. Give all students their CAGs alongside their final calculated grade
2. Use your record of existing requests to follow-up, and follow up any new ones
3. Have CAGs available on results day, but only if students ask
4. Follow up new requests for CAGs after results day

Remember, you can't refuse to release this data, and there is no particular language or form that has to be used. You must respond within normal GDPR guidelines after tomorrow's results day

Appeals and uni entries

- 'A buyers' market' for university places this year – so we should be optimistic
- UCAS deadline extended to 7 September
- Universities asked to 'hold' places of candidates who are appealing grades
- Some unis will allow a January late-start to the course if students resit in October (results before Christmas)

The autumn series

- Available for all general qualifications and vocational exam elements in all subjects no matter how small
- The third of the triple locks
- Schools not currently under statutory obligation to put exams on – but wait and see. Schools are expected to make provision. Resits should be organised by the students' current school, not their next place of study or employment
- £30m fund to pay for autumn series including cost of entries, cost of staff and cost of booking a venue (can either be done through DfE or school with costs reimbursed)

Final key points for leaders, governors and staff tomorrow

- There is no such thing as a headline school result. You can work it out if you like and share, but nobody is going to tell you this. You don't have to release this.
- What is the key narrative you're telling
- Despite how we may be feeling, important to be positive and supportive for students
- Be ready to talk to individual students about their options – remember the uni phone call is different this year
- Appeals and autumn resits should be considered a final resort if no other option
- **Above all, focus on the progression of students onto their next stage of learning**

Thank you

- Any questions?
- Next seminar at 16.00 on Wednesday 19 August on GCSEs, school reopenings, and Ofsted
- RMTeam@ssatuk.co.uk