



Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP
Chair, Education Select Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

29 September 2021

Dear Chair - Mr Halfon,

Re: Arrangements for regulated qualifications in 2022

I am writing to inform you of decisions Ofqual has taken about regulated qualifications being taken in 2022. Given the Committee's interest in the detail of the arrangements, I am writing to you in confidence ahead of an announcement that will be made tomorrow. This information is under embargo until 00:01 30 September 2021.

Grading in GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022

We will announce tomorrow our decision about the grading standard of GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2022. This is my first significant decision as Chief Regulator and I recognise its vital importance in furtherance of our statutory objectives to maintain standards and promote public confidence. It is also in line with our duty to have regard to the interests of learners, which we interpret as fairness. I spoke at my pre-appointment hearing about my commitment to considering the interests of learners in our decisions.

After the disruption of the last two years, it is important that we get back to exams and other formal assessments, so that students have a fair chance to show what they know, understand and can do. It is also important that our decision about grading is considered in the context of the adaptations that are being made to exams in 2022, which are set out below.

We recognise the importance of returning to the pre-pandemic grade profile but, in the interests of fairness and balancing our objectives, we will not return to that grade profile in one year. Instead, 2022 will be a transition year to reflect that we are in a pandemic recovery period and students' education has been disrupted. We will aim, therefore, to reflect a midway point between 2021 and 2019 – so that results overall will be higher than in 2019, but not as high as in 2020. This approach will provide a safety net for this year's students as well as a step back to normality. In 2023, we aim to return to results that are in line with those in pre-pandemic years.

As usual, our rules will require exam boards to use a range of qualitative and quantitative evidence so that grade boundaries are set in a way that is as fair as possible for all students, across all subjects and exam boards.

Grading in GCSEs, AS and A levels in autumn 2021

A small number of students will take exams this autumn. These exams, with the exception of the usual November sittings for GCSE English language and mathematics, are for those students who want to improve on their grade from summer 2021 or who had planned to enter in summer 2021 but were unable to obtain a teacher assessed grade. For this reason, exam boards will seek to align autumn 2021 grading with summer 2021. This is the same approach we took in autumn 2020, when grading was aligned to summer 2020.

Grading in vocational and technical qualifications in 2022

The decision on the approach to grading GCSEs and A levels will have an impact on certain vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) used for similar purposes, including progressing to further study. Our regulatory framework requires awarding organisations to secure, as far as possible, that VTQ learners are not disadvantaged nor advantaged compared with their GCSE and A level peers. To do this we expect them to take account of the approach for GCSEs and A levels when setting standards in their own qualifications.

Adaptations to GCSEs, AS and A levels

I understand that the Department for Education (DfE) is writing to you separately about the outcome of our joint consultation on [changes to the assessment of GCSE, AS and A level in 2022](#). The DfE is responsible for those decisions that relate to policy intent and the scope of the subject content to be taught and assessed. Ofqual is responsible for those decisions that relate to the assessment of the subject content.

In light of this and the broad support reflected in responses to the consultation, DfE has decided to implement the policy proposals about changes to the subject content set out in the consultation document. Ofqual has confirmed that it can effectively regulate assessment arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels in summer 2022 in light of these decisions and will make changes to its regulations where appropriate. As such, we will jointly announce tomorrow confirmation of all changes to 2022 exams proposed in the consultation following strong support for the proposals from students, parents and teachers. These plans recognise the disruption caused to this year group's education as a result of the pandemic, while balancing the need to return to exams as the fairest possible form of assessment. The changes give students a choice of topics in some GCSE exams such as English and history and provide additional materials like formulae sheets in mathematics and science exams, as well as advance notice of the focus of exam content in other subjects. Full detail will be provided in the [consultation decisions](#) that will be published tomorrow.

Adaptations in VTQs

In August, we announced decisions following a [joint consultation](#) with DfE on arrangements for the assessment and awarding of Vocational and Technical Qualifications and Other General Qualifications in 2021 to 2022. The response confirmed the government's intention that exams and assessments will go ahead in 2021-2022 and that all content should be taught as far as is feasible to support students to progress. However, recognising the disruption to their education that many students have faced, we outlined the scope of the adaptations that may be necessary to maximise teaching time, support students to take their exams and demonstrate their progress fairly.

Contingency arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels

The Government has confirmed its firm intention that exams will take place next year and we will play our part in making sure they do. We recognise, however, that while the path of the pandemic remains unpredictable, it is important to plan for the unlikely event that exams cannot be held in a way which is safe and fair.

We will launch a joint consultation that will run from 30 September until 13 October. We encourage all those with an interest to respond. Following extensive engagement with the sector, we propose that the plans would again be based on Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs). We are consulting on proposals that would improve on the 2021 approach to reduce teacher workload and best help students prepare for the most likely scenario of a return to exams.

Contingency arrangements for vocational and technical qualifications

We have also published our contingency plans for VTQs that seek to achieve parity and consistency where relevant with the arrangements proposed for GCSEs, AS and A levels. These include that for VTQs most similar to GCSEs, AS and A levels, qualifications would be awarded using TAGs. VTQs that require students to demonstrate occupational or professional competence would need to be delayed rather than awarded using a TAG, to ensure that students are able to demonstrate the full set of knowledge and skills required.

The diversity of the VTQ landscape means that a one-size-fits-all approach is not applicable or desirable. As such, responsibility for setting out the requirements for TAGs rests with awarding organisations. Ofqual will continue to work with awarding organisations to ensure that teachers and institutions are prepared and equipped to offer TAGs in the most effective and efficient way, should they ever be needed.

Results days

As exams return next year, results days will follow the pre-pandemic established format, with results for AS and A levels released on 18 August and for GCSEs 25 August. VTQs most similar to GCSEs and A levels, that are used for progression, should be awarded on or before GCSE and A level results day. Other types of qualifications, such as Functional Skills and those that are not tied to an academic year, will continue to be awarded throughout the year. This decision is in the interests of secure delivery of results and I believe, from my time as a school leader, will allow centres to best support their students.

I hope you have found this information useful. I would be happy to speak with you should you have any questions and, of course, to appear before the Committee in due course. I look forward to leading Ofqual through these pivotal years as we continue to manage the significant impact of the pandemic on students and apprentices.

Yours sincerely,



Jo Saxton, PhD,

Chief Regulator.