

IOP Response to the outcome of the joint DfE and Ofqual consultation on alternative arrangement to summer exams – 2021

Following the decision made in January 2021 to **cancel exams** at level 2 and 3 for the academic year 2020-2021, the Office for Qualifications and Examinations Regulation (Ofqual) and the Department for Education (DfE) released a [consultation](#) on [how GCSEs, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021](#). The IOP's response made recommendations to ensure the alternative system would be reliable and workable for teachers, and achieve equality and fairness in grade awarding, as well as parity between schools.

The [outcome](#) of this consultation is a system whereby:

- Students will receive grades **awarded and determined by teachers**
- Pupils will only be assessed on **what they have been taught**
- **No algorithm** will be used
- Exam boards will provide **detailed guidance for teachers** before the end of the spring term
- [Students studying vocational and technical qualifications \(VTQs\)](#) will also **receive grades assessed by teachers** rather than sitting exams

Here below the IOP provides further comment on some of the key points of the new arrangements. Overall, it is important for the physics community that this system does not reduce grades in physics or reduce the number of students progressing their study in the discipline. The IOP will work to support schools and teachers as they adapt to the new system.

We advise education providers to read the following Ofqual guidance:

Guidance for **general qualifications**: <https://bit.ly/30Xbpqf>

Guidance for **vocational and technical qualifications**: <https://bit.ly/3qVQazG>

Guidance for **technical qualifications**: <https://bit.ly/3s1D9WN>

Only the content which students have been taught will be assessed, using assessments throughout the year

The 2021 arrangements will mean pupils are assessed only on the content they have been taught by their teacher, to allow for the fact that educators do not all teach the syllabus in the same order, and have had reduced access to resources across the academic year. The IOP agrees with this approach, as it will ensure physics students will only be graded based on the content they have covered in class, and not disadvantage these students for not having access to the wider curriculum.

The IOP agrees with the decision to assess students through the means of mock exams, coursework, or other work completed as part of a pupil's course, such as essays or in-class tests, in place of uniform exams taking place at the same time across England. This will provide teachers with the flexibility they need to include the content covered in class, and the ability to deliver these in any education setting (either at home or in class), throughout the remainder of the academic year.

IOP Statement

The IOP supports the provision of guidance, training, and the formation of assessment materials, such as questions, by exam boards. This will provide the required support to teachers, promote best practice and enshrine the quality and standards required, as well as take some burden off of teachers to write assessment materials themselves. The IOP further supports the outlined timeline of teachers submitting grades to exam boards by 18 June, allowing as much teaching time as possible before teachers make their assessments.

Grades will be determined by teachers

The IOP strongly recommended that rather than determining the full grade, teachers should establish marks and a sequenced list of students based on a range of in-class assessments, but that then the exam boards should use these to award grades. This was recommended to promote parity between schools, as awarding grades at a school level will inevitably result in wide disparities between schools about what counts as performance at a given grade.

Whilst exam boards will provide guidance for grade awarding before the end of the spring term, the IOP is concerned that there will not be consistency in grading between schools, which could lead to some students missing out from being able to study physics and STEM at the next education stage.

In order to achieve fairness in grade awarding by teachers within education institutes, schools, colleges and other educational settings will conduct multiple quality assurance checks, such as checking consistency of judgements across teachers and that the correct processes were followed.

This system will place a significant burden onto teachers and schools, who have not experienced this process before, and are already strained after undertaking significant adaptations to their teaching and operations across the year. This will reduce the ability for teachers and schools to focus on teaching and learning, which could impact the quality and efficiency of teaching in the remainder of the year, adding further detriment to students' education.

The IOP is also concerned about bias in grade awarding for subjects such as physics. As outlined in [IOP's Limit Less campaign](#), students from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to experience discrimination within the education system, and this situation could further entrench existing inequalities in education outcomes, cutting off STEM routes for some students.

Results day will be brought forward

Results days for GCSE, A level and some vocational qualifications will take place in the week of 9 August, two weeks in advance of the usual week of the 23 August. This move has been made to provide additional time for appeals to be completed, and every student will have the right to appeal their grade.

The IOP is concerned that the awarding of grades by teachers will result in a rise in appeals, as students have different expectations of their teachers than they do of an exam board. This will add yet more burden to teachers and schools.