

Dear pupils, parents, and carers,

You may have seen headlines regarding decisions that have been made about exams in summer 2023. I am writing to explain more fully what this means for pupils preparing for GCSEs, AS, A levels and VTQs this year.

The government, the exams regulator Ofqual and the exam boards have confirmed the following:

- At a national level, grades will be in line with grades in 2019. This was always likely to be the case this year, after a one-year transition year when exams returned in 2022.
- However, there will be a safety net to ensure that, nationally, grades are not lower than they were in 2019.
- This means that, generally speaking, pupils have the same chance of getting a grade A* or C at A level, or a grade 9 or 5 at GCSE, as in 2019.
- Exams in vocational and technical qualifications will also return to a 2019 grade profile.
- Formula sheets will be provided in the GCSE maths, physics and combined sciences exams, meaning that pupils will not need to memorise these formulae or equations.
- Advanced information about where to focus revision, which was provided in 2022, will **not** be provided this year. Pupils will need to learn and revise the whole specification as normal. Any topic could come up in the exam.
- If a pupil has studied the whole course but is ill during the exam period, they may be able to receive a grade by sitting one paper in the qualification rather than the previous rule of 25% of the assessment, although certification of illness will be needed.

Is it fair to return to 2019 grading?

Last year, the Department for Education and Ofqual announced their intention to return to a national pre-pandemic grade profile in summer 2023, so we were aware this was coming.

The decision means that, at a national level, grades will be roughly the same as they were in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

However, the government has put an additional safety net in place to ensure that, overall, grades in 2023 are not lower than in 2019. Because this cohort of pupils' learning was affected by the pandemic (although they weren't subject to national school closures during their course, unlike the previous three cohorts), we might expect the standard of work in exams to be lower than in 2019. However, the safety net will ensure that, overall, grades are not lower than in 2019, even if the quality of work is lower at a national level.

Colleges, universities and apprenticeship-providers are aware of the changing grade profile year on year and will factor this into their decision making. Because pupils are largely competing for places with other pupils in the same year, they are not disadvantaged by this policy.

Why were grades in 2020 – 2022 higher than normal?

In 2020, schools and colleges were asked to provide a centre-assessed-grade for pupils. Initially, these were then rounded up or down by an algorithm. After that, the initial centre-assessed-grade was used. This was during the national lockdown.

In 2021, schools and colleges were asked to provide a teacher-assessed grade based on the work that pupils produced throughout their course. Because the nature of the assessment was different, and schools were told to give pupils the benefit of the doubt when they were between two grades, this saw a higher proportion of pupils nationally achieve top grades and pass grades at A level and GCSE than in normal exam years.

In 2022, the government decided to have a transition year, with grades nationally at a midpoint between 2019 and 2021. At a national level, this is what happened in the summer.

What if I or my child has been particularly affected by Covid-19?

There is no current provision to give a different grade if a pupil has been particularly affected by Covid. The best thing pupils can do is to catch up with any learning they may have lost, and to talk to their teachers about any aspects of the subject they don't understand or may have misconceptions about.

Pupils and teachers are no longer encouraged to test themselves for Covid. If pupils have symptoms, they are encouraged to isolate for three days (five days for teachers), so the impact of any Covid-related illness is likely to be a week at most.

Pupils may be able to receive special consideration if they are ill for one or more exam in the summer, but they must have studied the whole course to be eligible for this.

Other long-term illnesses should be discussed with your subject teacher or pastoral or academic lead.

What other adaptations are in place?

Formula sheets in GCSE maths, physics and combined science will continue. Subject teachers will use these sheets throughout the year so that pupils become familiar with them and how to use them.

The other adaptations that were in place for 2022 are not due to continue into the 2023 summer exam series. This includes a reduction in content for GCSE English literature, history, ancient history and geography, and advanced information in all other GCSE and A level subjects, and changes to the course in some vocational or technical subjects.

This means that pupils must learn and revise the full content for each qualification they are taking.