



The Sixth Form College, Colchester

PROTOCOL for AWARDING TEACHER ASSESSED GRADES 2021

Following the cancellation of the summer 2021 exam series, Ofqual imposed an “Extraordinary Regulatory Framework” under which centres such as The Sixth Form College Colchester were required to submit a “Teacher Assessed Grade” for each candidate in each A level and GCSE subject – as well as other subjects such as Core Maths and EPQ.

For BTEC and Applied General subjects, the process was slightly different – and indeed differed between subjects. But, generally, BTEC and Applied General subjects submitted and marked the available coursework as normal, which was standardised by an External Verifier, and then supplied a Teacher Assessed Grade for the examination unit (if applicable).

PLEASE NOTE: Teaching Staff are not allowed under any circumstances to discuss the Teacher Assessed Grade submitted for a particular student, nor to justify how the TAG was calculated for an individual student in a specific subject.

The general College Protocol used is outlined below, and students should be able to see clearly how their formal assessments relate to the final grade awarded by the Awarding Body.

This protocol gives a clear framework for awarding Teacher Assessed Grades (TAGs) at the College – and is based on guidance from, and to meet the requirements laid down by, the Government, its specific agencies (namely Ofqual and the Joint Council for Qualifications) and the Awarding Bodies (Exam Boards). Teaching departments used this protocol alongside any specific-subject information, training and guidance given by Awarding Bodies.

The process underpinning the allocation of grades is necessary to ensure that the evidence for the decisions made regarding Teacher Assessed Grades is clear, that the decisions are evidence-based and that grades awarded are standardised across the cohort and in line with national standards.

Note: although the official title of the grade is a Teacher Assessed Grade, within the College we have chosen to continue to refer to Centre Assessed Grades (CAGs) as in 2020 because the grades were submitted on behalf of the whole College, not individual teachers, and have been arrived at by a range of collaborative processes and internal quality assurance moderations. There is, however a key difference between the CAGs in 2020 and the TAGs in 2021. In 2020, courses had nearly been completed by the time of the first lockdown towards the end of March and Government advised that grades were to be based on what the student would likely have achieved if they had completed the course i.e. sat the exam. In 2021, the exams were cancelled much earlier and College was required to give a holistic judgement based more on the whole course and “how the student aligns with the grade descriptors” based on evidence, not potential.

Departments kept clear documentation as to why particular grades were awarded for each student. Following the College’s submission of Teacher Assessed Grades, Awarding Bodies engaged in a sampling exercise and asked us to submit further evidence to justify the grades submitted for particular subjects. No adjustments were made to the College’s Teacher Assessed Grades as a result of this process.

Key Objectives

The key objective set by Ofqual and the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) that, by the end of this process, students will receive a grade which is:

- **Objective, fair and evidence-based**, and which is a
- **Reasonable exercise of professional judgement** of their **performance across a range of evidence**, based on
- the curriculum content that they have been taught **over the course of study**.

(from JCQ/DfE [guidance document](#))

The JCQ guidance also states that “in coming to this judgement, centres should seek to make it no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years. This is the same advice that was given to schools and colleges in summer 2020 – the expected performance standard for a grade has not changed. However, for 2021, centres should bear in mind that students might not have been taught all the content and so might not demonstrate such a broad range of knowledge, skills and understanding.” In other words, a grade awarded in 2021 should be as rigorous as in previous years but might not necessarily be based on the same depth of study.

Academic Departments at College were required to make a holistic professional judgement about a Teacher Assessed Grade for each student, balancing different sources of evidence. Academic Departments at College have a good understanding of their students’ performance and how they compare to other students within the subject both this year and in previous years. Departments were asked to consider each student’s performance over the course of study and make a realistic judgement of a Teacher Assessed Grade. This could include a U grade.

The College protocol aimed to ensure that the TAGs awarded by College were “objective, reasonable and fair” by establishing a methodology that all subjects could adhere to, despite their differences in assessment methods, and to ensure that the decision-making process was evidence-based and clearly documented.

This system of Teacher Assessed Grades was devised and implemented by the government. It is not ideal in many ways and undoubtedly presents a ‘rough justice’ model for subjects and students. It also represented a challenge for a large centre like The Sixth Form College Colchester and, especially, for the relatively big cohorts in some of our subjects where a number of teachers are involved in delivering the curriculum. However, our protocol outlines the ways in which we have ensured that standardisation and fairness are applied across a cohort.

The College protocol instructed Departments to be mindful of and act against subconscious bias when working on TAGs. Studies report that groups such as boys, students from ethnic minorities, students from lower socio-economic backgrounds and ‘difficult’ students are at risk of being disadvantaged if their teachers are awarding final grades, as opposed to the ‘blind marking’ that happens in public exams. In order to mitigate against this, College protocol was clear that the awarding of TAGs must be:

- Professional
- Data-based (based on the selected evidence for the cohort - with the exception of those qualifying for Special Consideration – which, as far as possible, should have a “high level of control” (JCQ), in other words produced by students in regulated conditions where teachers

could be certain it was their own work. For the most part, work with a “high level of control” is work produced in College under exam-style conditions or NEA (coursework).

- Objective (based on printed criteria e.g. Assessment Objectives)
- Transparent (based as far as possible on marks that students are aware of)
- Collaborative (where possible, drawing on the views of as many colleagues as relevant and coordinated by the HOD or their delegate who has oversight and impartiality)
- Independently moderated by Senior Managers
- Further independent moderation using an external service.

Individual Awarding Bodies published some specific guidance for calculating TAGs in some subjects (as assessments vary) and teaching staff monitored this carefully to ensure that this was in line with the overall College protocol and expectations. For example, Awarding Bodies normally refer to bands or marks but never grades in mark schemes. This year, however, Grade Descriptors were supplied for the Teacher Assessed Grades process and can be found [here](#) for A levels, and [here](#) for GCSEs.

Selecting evidence

The JCQ guidance states that “it is not necessary for every aspect of the specification to be assessed to arrive at a grade. The aim is to include evidence that assesses the student’s ability across a *reasonable* range of subject content, reflecting, where possible, all assessment objectives, as set out in qualification specifications whether in the classroom or via remote learning”. The evidence could include work which has already been completed during the course as well as that which will be completed in Spring 2021. It is important that the judgements are objective and based on the evidence produced by a student on the content that they have been taught.

JCQ’s instruction is that, as far as possible, the sources of evidence should be consistent across a class or cohort of students, and centres should record the reasons for their selection. In College, most students took at least two formal exam-style Internal Assessments in April and May 2021 in each subject which was anticipated to show a level of performance in line with, or continuing anticipated progress from, previous formal assessments, coursework/NEA and homework across the course. These Internal Assessments, sat under formal exam-style conditions and using Awarding Body assessment materials, including mark schemes, represented for most students the culmination of two years of study when their skills and knowledge would be most developed.

However, in a centre of our size, and considering the extraordinary circumstances in which the curriculum has been delivered over the last two years, it may not always be possible to base each student’s grade on the same assessments. JCQ state that “the centre will make the final judgement about what is to be included.” In line with JCQ guidance, a process of Special Consideration applies to some students and is outlined later in the document. JCQ required centres to “document the rationale for any instances where consistent evidence is not used for a whole class or cohort.”

THE PROCESS IN DETAIL

1. HISTORICAL DATA

JCQ state that historical data should only be *used* after grading judgements have been made and that it is particularly useful to do so for centres with large cohorts and whose results tend to be relatively

stable, which would be true for most subjects at this College. However, Departments were asked to *be aware* of historical data at the initial stage, if not to formally use it until the end of the process. The use of historical data is being referred to in some quarters as a “sense check” – and Awarding Bodies stated that they would undertake ‘targeted inspections’ where TAGs deviated from the historical norm for a centre or department.

Therefore, before starting the TAGs process, Academic Departments were asked to consider their results for the last three years where examinations took place (2017-2019) as an initial benchmark to establish roughly the percentage of grades normally achieved in each subject. However, Departments were not expected to submit TAGs which rigidly reflected previous years’ results. There are many reasons why results this year might be better or worse than in previous years – a change in staffing, a change of specification or a new approach by the department, for example. Furthermore, the rate of achievement is not absolute – it depends on the relative strength of the cohort.

The College protocol made Teaching Staff and managers aware of the risk factors outlined above, and of which they must remain mindful to ensure the process was fair.

2. SPRING ASSESSMENTS 2021

In awarding Teacher Assessed Grades, although centres should consider the standard at which each student has performed over the course of study, it is likely that in many subjects most students will perform at a higher level as the course progresses, and therefore that assessments from the second year could well carry more weight, although this will not always be the case and will vary by subject and indeed by a student’s individual circumstances.

Students were told that the Spring Internal Assessments 2021 were very significant but that other work could be taken into account.

Given this, departments initially allocated grades to each student based on the aggregate of their performance in Spring Assessments 2021, provided that assessments set in that subject covered the breadth of what was taught on the whole course since the composition, length and breadth of Spring Internal Assessments varied from subject to subject depending on various factors. This allocation of an initial grade to each student was then adjusted as described in the next stage.

Departments undertook a thorough process of quality assurance for all Spring Assessments – double marking, sampling, ‘blind’ marking, moderating by HOD or HOS – and where practical, a combination of several of these.

Students were provided with any relevant Exam Access Arrangements (e.g. extra time or a scribe) during their Spring Assessments 2021 unless the student chose not to use them. If, for any reason, this did not happen, allowances were made when considering the TAG and this was formally recorded.

Where a student could have underperformed in one or all Spring Assessments 2021 due to extreme personal circumstances, a central system of Special Consideration applied (see later) but even without this, they could be awarded a higher grade, if appropriate, as adjustments were made using the process below.

3. FURTHER ASSESSMENTS

Having allocated an initial grade based on the Spring Assessments, there was then the opportunity to adjust the grade by considering further evidence.

If the Spring Assessments did not allow assessment of “the student’s ability across a reasonable range of subject content reflecting, where possible, all assessment objectives”, this was an essential step. This was also the case where there was coursework/NEA to consider.

However, if the Spring Assessments (and, where applicable, NEA/Coursework) *did* cover the substantial course content, including all Assessment Objectives, then a student’s grade should not be adjusted downwards, only increased as a result of other assessment evidence, since the Spring Assessment is likely to reflect a student’s increasing confidence, knowledge and ability after two years of study, as outlined in stage 2 above.

Heads of Department worked with Subject Teachers as they then factored in other, key, formal Assessments which had a “high level of control” and then adjusted students’ initial grades accordingly for example, in areas where the Spring Internal Assessment performance was on a borderline between two grades. This was likely to be either or both of:

- NEA/Coursework
- The Year 1 Internal Assessment (taken in September 2020).

The Teacher Assessed grades represent a holistic judgement. The grading process is not intended to be a formulaic calculation, and should account for the context in which each student’s evidence has been produced. This means that where coursework is considered, departments will be aware of what percentage of the overall it usually contributes, but those percentages no longer apply to the Teacher Assessed Grade. Instead coursework/NEA needed to be considered as a part of the whole skills package.

NEA/Coursework represents a “High level of control” piece of evidence because, although it was produced independently, there was a supervised drafting process and students have formally signed to say that the NEA is their own work, using the Awarding Body declaration forms.

Again, students were provided with their Exam Access Arrangements (e.g. extra time or a scribe) during their Year 1 Internal Assessments 2020 unless the student chose not to use them. If, for any reason, this did not happen, allowances made when considering the TAG and this was formally recorded.

4. OTHER ASSESSED WORK

Departments routinely set between two and four standardised tasks throughout each academic year as part of ongoing assessment. Where these standardised tasks tested skills or knowledge that have not already been accounted for, they could also be factored in, in a holistic sense, to adjust individual grades, if relevant. If these assessments were not conducted at College under supervision then they may not count as “high level of control” and might therefore be less significant to the composition of the overall Teacher Assessed Grade.

5. SPECIAL CONSIDERATION and STUDENTS WITH SIGNIFICANT AMOUNTS OF MISSING WORK

In line with JCQ requirements, a process of Special Consideration was in operation.

The term 'Special Consideration' often causes confusion as it is sometimes wrongly used to mean 'exam access arrangements' like extra time or a scribe.

For information, Special Consideration in a normal year is where a student's exam performance is likely to be affected by an incident beyond their control which occurred very close to the exam. While it is reassuring for students and parents to know that 'Special Consideration' will be applied, the actual level of uplift is very limited indeed – a terminally ill candidate would only get a 5% uplift in their exam, for example, so if they achieved 15 marks out of 25 in an exam, they would only get 1 extra mark under the usual system of Special Consideration.

Special consideration did not apply in the usual way in 2021 because students did not take their exams and we were [specifically advised by JCQ](#) that no numerical uplift should be applied. However, where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, centres should "*bear that in mind* when making their judgements" (JCQ).

Ideally the piece of work affected by the difficult circumstances would simply be discounted and replaced with an alternative, and our protocol allows for this to happen. But if this was not possible, or if the piece(s) of work affected by circumstances *was* the alternative assessment(s) that were disrupted and need special consideration, Departments were asked to "bear in mind" the student's Special Consideration but at the same time remember the very small percentage uplift normally awarded for this and that the final grade needed to be evidence-based, not based on potential.

Teaching Staff and Senior Tutors shared information with the Exams Department regarding students who were affected by incidents around the time of the Internal Assessments 2021. Special Consideration does not apply to ongoing medical conditions or situations; there must have been a significant flare-up or development around the time of the Internal Assessment to qualify for Special Consideration.

Special Consideration does not apply where students have struggled due to the pandemic, either due to topics not being taught or in personal circumstances where they were not able to fully access certain parts of the course for practical or mental health reasons. The reason for this is that this TAGs process is designed to factor this in at a centre level and at a student level (by having the assessment based on many pieces of data rather than one exam).

Where the evidence considered for a student varied from that that used for the rest of the cohort, this was recorded and explained.

Teacher Assessment Grades must also be based on "assessment of the student's ability across a *reasonable* range of subject content, reflecting, where possible, all assessment objectives". Where a student has very limited evidence available, and has not been able to take the Spring Assessments 2021 to compensate for this, unfortunately their final grade will need to reflect this.

6. INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The provisional TAGs were to be submitted to the Assistant Principal line managers for each Academic Department who do not necessarily have subject specific knowledge but can make a judgement as to whether the outcomes are fair, based on the assessment data and methodology given. They discussed

with Heads of Department whether the overall grade allocations reflected results as historical data (and why, if not) as well as probing the data at an individual student level to ensure that the TAGs awarded to individual students are in line with the available data and methodology.

7. EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

The final draft TAGs were sent to be analysed by the Sixth Form Colleges Association's "6 Dimensions" service, which College uses annually to provide detailed analysis of its results. This formed part of the general "sense check" using historical data. The 6 Dimensions analysis provided is complex and detailed, measuring overall department TAGs against a range of factors in order to highlight any anomalies.

Senior Managers and Heads of Department considered the 6 Dimensions report and made minor adjustments based on the recommendations of the analysis, where this was the right thing to do in the light of the available evidence on a student-by-student basis.

8. TEACHER ASSESSED GRADES SUBMITTED TO THE AWARDING BODIES

Centre Assessed Grades were submitted to the individual Awarding Bodies by the 18th June deadline. The grades were entered by the College's Exams department, who triple checked them before submission. Departments then re-checked the data that had been entered to ensure any potential administrative errors could be corrected before Results Day in August.

APPEALING YOUR GRADE

This document should reassure you that the CAGs protocol that the College followed ensured that there was no room for malpractice or administrative error. The College has put in a lot of effort to ensuring that the grades awarded to students are objective, fair and evidence-based, and are a reasonable exercise of professional judgement of their performance across a range of evidence, based on the curriculum content that they have been taught over the course of study.

However, if you think your grade is inaccurate, details of the appeals process will be made available in the days leading up to Results Day in August.

APPENDIX

1. Informing students of Marks:

Coursework marks– it has recently been a requirement that students are entitled to know their coursework mark (but not the grade) before it is submitted to the exam board, with the ability to ask for this to be formally reviewed. As the coursework marks were not submitted to the exam boards this year, the requirement to tell the students their coursework mark does not apply.

Spring Assessment 2021 marks and feedback – students should be told the raw marks of their Spring Assessments, although not the grade that this equates to. Some departments also

made students aware of where the grade boundaries were in previous years, and many students were aware of this from other assessments, although grade boundaries can and do move year on year for a variety of reasons. There was no requirement to give formal feedback on the assessment except for giving the mark.

2. **UCAS predicted grades** are not a factor in this TAG decision-making process (and teaching staff were not permitted to take into account what a student 'needs' to get into their chosen Higher Education course). The UCAS predicted grades are collated in September so were out of date by the time the CAGs were calculated. In addition, the UCAS grades tend to be aspirational, representing where the student hopes to be, and where we hope they will be, rather than their actual level of achievement at that moment. Finally, the UCAS predicted grades are submitted for a different purpose (and to a different organisation) so are not relevant to the TAG process.

3. **Exam Access Arrangements.** Exam Access Arrangements relating to literacy (e.g. extra time) should still apply in the process of allocating Centre Assessment Grades. Where a student was awarded their extra time in formal assessments e.g. Spring Internal Assessments, January mocks and/or other timed assessments, this has already been taken into account. If for any reason they did not receive this entitlement, Academic Departments were instructed to make the appropriate allowances when deciding the TAGs.

4. **Malpractice in Assessments or NEA**

A student cheating in an assessment or plagiarising in their NEA is seeking an unfair advantage.

If malpractice occurred in an assessment, a mark of zero was only awarded as a last resort. The College was tasked with providing a grade based on the students' level of performance, not their performance in one particular assessment. The department could either disregard this piece of work or offer another opportunity to take an assessment, where a different paper should be set.

In the case of plagiarism in coursework/NEA, it is unlikely that the substantial piece of work can be repeated and it might be necessary to award a zero. However, the zero should not count against the student as it is not a true reflection of their work unless the NEA tests a skill or assessment objective which is not tested in other assessments. The final decision on the mark awarded in such circumstances will also depend on the extent and nature of the plagiarism.

The usual JCQ malpractice procedures applied and such incidents would be investigated and reported in the usual way. Any student malpractice would also be investigated under the student disciplinary policy, as usual.

5. Parents or students exerting undue influence

The JCQ rules are clear that any party trying to exert undue influence on the College's Teacher Assessed Grades should be reported as malpractice.

Incorporating the involvement of private tutors in CAGs judgements or gradings is not permissible for students enrolled at the College. JCQ guidance states that "evidence set, supervised and/or marked by a private tutor with whom the centre has no established relationship: Evidence produced with a tutor should not be accepted where the centre has taught the student that subject."

6. Conflict of Interest

Decision-makers were required to declare a conflict of interest where they have responsibility for submitting grades for children of family or friends. These will be held by the Exams department.