

FAQs

How should a teacher balance the evidence when a student scores exceptionally highly on a series of additional materials questions, and less well in their other work? (FAQ001)

While there is no one type of evidence that takes precedence, evidence gathered in conditions that enable confidence about the authenticity of the students' work will give more confidence in the overall holistic judgement. If a teacher identifies a difference in performance between different types of assessment evidence, their grading decision should reflect the evidence they consider, in their professional judgement, to more authentically represent the student's level of attainment.

Teachers should not place too much reliance on a source of evidence for which students had the opportunity to prepare /rehearse the answers, if that evidence is out of line with other evidence across the course.

For re-sitting students, can grades from previous examination series be used as evidence to support a grading judgement for a student? (FAQ002)

Grades achieved in GCSEs *during* a course of study (for example, a grade achieved in November 2020 by a student who has continued to study through the rest of the 2020-21 academic year) or prior to starting a new course of study as a re-sitter (for example, a grade achieved in June 2020, after which a student began studying for a re-sit opportunity) can be used as evidence to support a grading judgement in the same qualification, for students that were planning to re-sit this summer.

We expect that this would be considered alongside evidence gathered more recently, to give a more accurate picture of a student's performance since their previous grade was achieved.

If no evidence has been gathered since the previous grade was achieved, there should not be an expectation of a student receiving a higher grade.

For EPQ, should boundaries from the Autumn/Winter 2020/21 series be used to guide grading decisions in summer 2021, or should teachers refer to boundaries from previous years? (FAQ003)

The grading judgement must be based on the work completed by a student. When reviewing the work, teachers should refer to the mark scheme, in line with the NEA guidance. Given the restrictions that have been in place, some elements may have been more difficult to complete. If, at the point of making grading decisions, there are elements of the student's work which reflect a significantly lower standard than the other sections, teachers should consider if this is the result of significant disruption at the time that the section was produced. If due to disruption, a grade should not be limited by elements which are at a lower standard or missing.

If it is necessary to refer to grade boundaries when make a grading judgement, refer to boundaries from January 2020 and earlier. Grade boundaries from winter series in 2020-21 reflected the circumstances of those examination series and should not be referred to when making grading judgements.

Is my centre allowed to include a grade in our Year 11 leavers' report, which will be published before the end of the Summer Term? (FAQ004)

Centres must ensure that students are aware of the evidence used to determine their grade. Although teachers may share results associated with individual pieces of evidence, which could be a grade or a mark, they must not share with students the grades they have or will submit to awarding organisations before results are released.

How many times does a student need to demonstrate one of the criteria described in a grade descriptor in order to attain it? (FAQ005)

Grade descriptors are general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics and are not meant to be overly prescriptive. They are based on the assessment objectives for the relevant subject. The most appropriate grade to award will depend in practice upon the extent to which the student has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of the evidence may be balanced by better performances in others. The grade descriptors have been produced to underpin centre's holistic grading judgements.

For these reasons, it is not possible to specify the number of times a student must demonstrate the criteria, or whether they must demonstrate all the criteria. It is likely to differ by subject and also by grade.

How can teachers identify features of grade descriptors in student work, while also accounting for the mark schemes in assessment materials – are teachers expected to take a best-fit approach or not? (FAQ006)

We advise teachers to use the mark schemes when assessing students' work and to take account of the coverage of the assessment objectives within the assessment materials. When assigning an overall grade to a student based on the evidence they have produced, the teacher should refer to the grade descriptors which provide general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics. They are based on the assessment objectives for the relevant subject.

What constitutes a special circumstance, when a teacher is considering if a piece of evidence 'doesn't reflect a student's usual level of performance' and should therefore be replaced or disregarded? (FAQ007)

Special circumstances that may lead a teacher to disregard a piece of evidence or to replace it with another piece of evidence, would cover instances where students were not provided with their approved access arrangements or reasonable adjustments when completing their work. This also applies where temporary illness or injury, bereavement, or some other event outside of the student's control might have temporarily affected their performance.

The guidance states that there is no minimum requirement for student evidence, but the Head of Centre is required to declare that 'students have been taught sufficient content to form the basis for a grade'. Is this a contradiction? (FAQ008)

There is no minimum requirement for student evidence, and we advise the focus should be on the quality rather than the quantity of evidence. 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. When collating the evidence that a student has completed, centres are advised to consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support the judgement that is being made. If not, then we advise centres to consider what additional assessments might be needed.

Can a student with sufficient evidence for a GCSE be entered for and awarded a grade this summer, even if they had not intended to complete their course of study until summer 2022? (FAQ009)

These arrangements have been put in place as a result of the disruption to the education of students due to complete their courses of study in summer 2021. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the government considered that exams could not be held in summer 2021 in a way which is, and which is perceived to be, fair. It is therefore not appropriate for students who had not intended to complete their course of study until summer 2022 to be awarded a GCSE this summer. The arrangements are in place to enable students who planned to take exams in summer 2021 to achieve grades.

Can a student receive a grade only on the basis of NEA work completed, if this is the only evidence available? (FAQ011)

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. Teachers are advised to consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support the judgement that is being made. Unless there is no time available to do so the teacher is advised to set additional assessments, where needed.

On submission of grades to the awarding organisation, Heads of Centre will declare they are satisfied that each student's grade is based on an appropriately broad range of evidence and that each student has been taught an appropriate amount of content to provide the basis for a grade. The most appropriate grade to award will depend in practice upon the extent to which the student has met the assessment objectives overall. Shortcomings in some aspects of the student's performances may be balanced by better performances in other aspects.

If the student's specific circumstances prevent additional assessment evidence being generated, the grade descriptors could be used to underpin a centre's holistic grading judgements in assigning an appropriate grade to the student. The significance of the NEA in the specific qualification, and the standard of the students' evidence are relevant factors in that determination.
