

MAY 2020

GCSE grade allocations in 2020: Guidance for EAL co-ordinators and EAL teachers



About The Bell Foundation

The Bell Foundation is a charity which aims to overcome exclusion through language education by working with partners on innovation, research, training and practical interventions. Through generating and applying evidence, we aim to change practice, policy and systems for children, adults and communities in the UK disadvantaged through language.

The Foundation works in two key areas:

- **The EAL Programme aims to improve the educational outcomes of children with English as an Additional Language in the UK to benefit the individual child and society as a whole. The Foundation works in partnership with a range of organisations across the education system to provide training and resources in order to build capacity, develop and evaluate models of good practice, and provide thought leadership.**
- **The Criminal Justice Programme seeks to break down the language barrier to accessing justice and rehabilitation for individuals in contact with the criminal justice system for whom English is an Additional Language. In 2017 the Foundation developed a long-term strategy for its work in the sector, with a focus on both victims and offenders of crime. The Foundation works through interventions in research, policy, practice and service support.**

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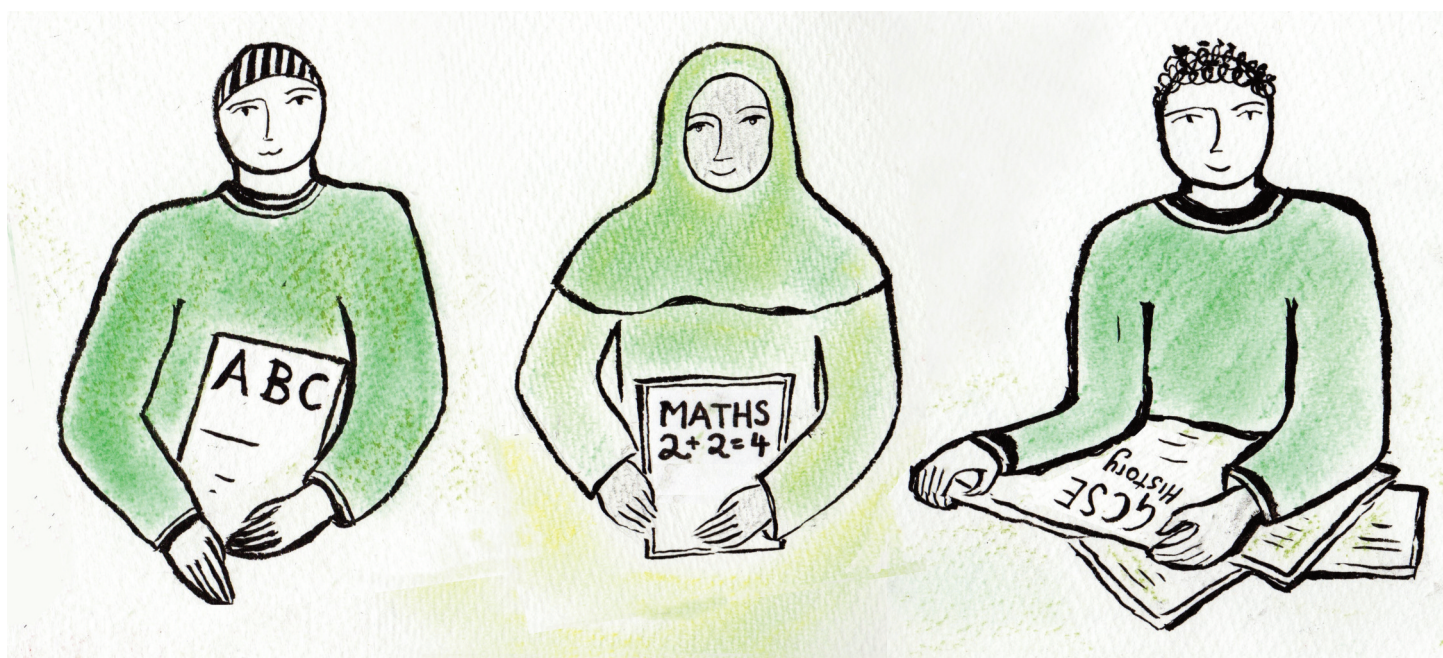
About this document

Ofqual has published guidance for teachers stating that *'schools and colleges should use their professional experience to make a fair and objective judgement of the grade they believe a student would have achieved had teaching and learning continued as normal and had they sat their exams. For students with English as an additional language (EAL), schools and colleges should consider the likely language acquisition a student would have made by the time of the exam, and any increased ability to demonstrate subject content knowledge, as part of this and reflect this in their judgement. They may seek further information from specialist EAL teachers as part of this.'*

The Bell Foundation has produced this paper to help EAL co-ordinators, EAL teachers and other EAL specialists participate in the grade allocation process. The paper supplements the guidance issued by Ofqual by focusing specifically on how the allocation of predicted grades by teachers, and the rank ordering of each student for each grade, will affect students who use EAL. It provides specific guidance for EAL co-ordinators and EAL teachers on the important role they play in ensuring fair and objective grade allocations for students who use EAL.

The paper considers two key areas:

- 1) How to help ensure a fair and equitable process for students with EAL in GCSE grade allocations in the absence of summer exams
- 2) How to support those students with EAL who are entered for Autumn GCSE exams during and after school closures



1. How to help ensure a fair and equitable process for students with EAL in GCSE grade allocations in the absence of summer exams

According to Ofqual, in the absence of exams, teacher assessment will provide students with the greatest opportunity for fair and equitable grade allocations.’ However, it is recommended that subject teachers work closely with EAL co-ordinators or EAL teachers to ensure predicted grades and rank ordering take full account of an EAL learner’s current proficiency in English in relation to their ability to demonstrate subject knowledge and understanding.

To support teachers in making fair and objective judgements of grades and rank ordering EAL professionals should:

- Play an active role in the assessment process, with a particular focus on those students who use EAL. By being part of this process, EAL professionals can help limit any conscious or unconscious bias in relation to students who use EAL. The evidence shared in the Equality Impact Assessment from Ofqual demonstrates that students with EAL are more likely to be underrated in teacher assessment than overrated. Of the three subjects analysed (English, maths and science), there were indications of under-prediction in either English or maths in all studies that looked at pupils with EAL.
- Encourage teachers to draw on the most up-to-date assessments of both proficiency in English and ability to demonstrate curriculum knowledge and understanding. For those settings that have been collecting on-going EAL assessment data, this information should be shared with teaching staff and considered when assigning grade judgements. It can be particularly helpful for subject teachers if proficiency in English data is presented alongside subject data as this can help them to identify trends of which they were not previously aware. For settings where there is no on-going assessment data, EAL practitioners should share their own professional experience of working with individual EAL pupils in relation to their proficiency in English and their ability to demonstrate subject knowledge and understanding. To inform these judgements, it can be useful to draw on informal observations made of a student, carry out reviews of written work and speak to staff who have worked closely with that student.
- Be mindful that some teachers may have no prior experience of working with data looking at proficiency in English and therefore may not see its relevance for their subject. This means that EAL professionals should be prepared to explain assessment data to teachers, in particular, how the data has been calculated and the potential relevance for grade allocations. To ensure this information is communicated clearly to staff and fully taken into consideration when allocating grades, EAL professionals should seek the support of Heads of Department, and/or members of the Senior Leadership Team to reinforce the importance of the data. When seeking the support of senior leaders, it may be useful to draw attention to research evidence which has consistently demonstrated that levels of English language proficiency among learners using EAL can be a key predictor of attainment (Strand, Malmberg and Hall 2015, Strand and Hessel, 2018, Strand and Lindorff 2020).
- Work with teachers to ensure that grade allocations take account of a learner’s ability to demonstrate knowledge and understanding in relation to all four strands of language knowledge and use: speaking, reading and viewing, writing, and listening. It is common for students with EAL to have spiky profiles i.e. they are stronger in some skills than others. For example, a student may be more confident in speaking than they are in writing, or they may understand more from reading than listening to oral instruction. It is important that judgements of a pupil’s abilities do not rest solely upon observations of one strand of language knowledge and use e.g. writing, as this is likely to provide a partial picture of their full knowledge and ability to use the English language to demonstrate curriculum learning.

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- Help teachers to consider the specific language demands of the different GCSE task types in relation to their pupil's ability to demonstrate subject knowledge and understanding. Some GCSEs, and some task types within an exam paper, are more accessible for those pupils with lower levels of language proficiency as they are less language heavy. For example, the calculator papers in maths are perhaps more accessible than GCSE geography papers which regularly feature extensive reading and writing tasks. It is important that where EAL students have a lower level of language proficiency in English this does not cloud judgements of cognitive ability. It may be the case that a student's capacity to take part in the national curriculum may be in advance of their communication skills in English.

2. How to support those students with EAL who are entered for Autumn GCSE exams

Those students who feel that their grades from the summer do not reflect their full ability will have the opportunity to take the exams in the Autumn. It is, therefore, likely that those students who are New to English or in the Early Acquisition stages of language development will opt to take exams in the Autumn term. Moreover, schools may not be able to allocate grades to a pupil who has recently arrived, as there may not be enough evidence of their ability to make a professional judgement. These pupils will have to sit Autumn exams in order to receive a grade.

Sitting exams in the Autumn may have both advantages and disadvantages for students with EAL. Advantages may arise from having had more time to develop both language proficiency and content knowledge assuming that schools are able to reopen, and teaching is able to take place. However, it is important to consider that academic language development takes place mainly within the school context. This is where pupils are exposed to and take part in a broad range of interactions with their teachers, peers and other school staff that help them make sense of subject content and fully participate in school life. During lockdown many students with EAL may have been deprived of such a rich and conducive context for language development. Instead, many pupils may have spent months with limited input and access to teaching approaches best suited to their needs in the run up to an Autumn exam.

This means that students with EAL will need on-going support both while schools are closed and when they reopen to ensure they have the opportunity to fulfill their potential when taking exams. To support this process EAL professionals should:

- Provide guidance to teachers on which students might benefit from taking the GCSE exams in the Autumn. EAL professionals should draw on up-to-date assessment data around proficiency in English, as well as prior experience of working with students and use this information to influence teachers. By drawing on this information as well as subject-specific progress data, teachers will be well positioned to support pupils in their decision making around whether to take Autumn exams.
- Use information drawn out from on-going EAL assessment to inform individually tailored targets and support strategies for teaching and learning. It is strongly recommended that schools use an EAL Assessment Framework to guide this process. A framework will enable more accurate and purposeful assessments of what a learner can do in English alongside curriculum learning, as well as providing a road map for progression to support the teaching and learning and preparation for exams. (An example is The Bell Foundation's evidence-informed and freely available EAL Assessment Framework for Schools and companion assessment resources, including, Digital Tracker and Classroom Support Strategies).

- Work with teaching staff, while home learning is taking place, to provide extra support (such as tutoring) for students using EAL in order to minimise potential loss of learning. Without extra support some students may miss out on: (1) exposure to models of academic English, (2) activities that enable them to notice, record and recall key language and features of academic language, (3) opportunities for extensive listening and speaking practice in English and (4) explicit language input and feedback on their spoken and written production. The disadvantage will be even greater for those children whose parents are ESOL users with low levels of proficiency in English and/or literacy issues and those who have a significant lack of knowledge and understanding of important areas concerning school life. See The Bell Foundation's EAL Nexus site for guidance on how to make home learning accessible to students with EAL.
- Work with teachers and teaching assistants to embed relevant interventions when schools return to ensure students with EAL receive focused support to help compensate for any loss of learning while schools were closed. Support should focus on accelerated language development alongside curriculum learning and exam preparation. EAL professionals should draw on proficiency in English data, where it exists, to help schools identify which pupils require the most immediate support. However, additional support will be especially important to those pupils who are recently arrived or New to English. Schools may want to consider providing additional in-class support from teaching assistants or EAL teachers, or scheduling after school EAL support classes which focus specifically on exam preparation, including the language needed for exams.
- Support subject teachers in building skills and expertise in teaching approaches that will help pupils achieve their full potential in the Autumn exams. Some teaching staff may benefit from professional development on areas such as setting language development targets alongside subject targets, integrating language-focused activities into subject lessons and supporting vocabulary and academic language development beyond subject-specific key words. For additional guidance on CPD for teaching staff see resources from The Bell Foundation including; a best practice article in SecEd magazine on CPD for the EAL classroom, freely available Webinars for practitioners, Secondary Classroom Support Strategies and Online training courses for practitioners.

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