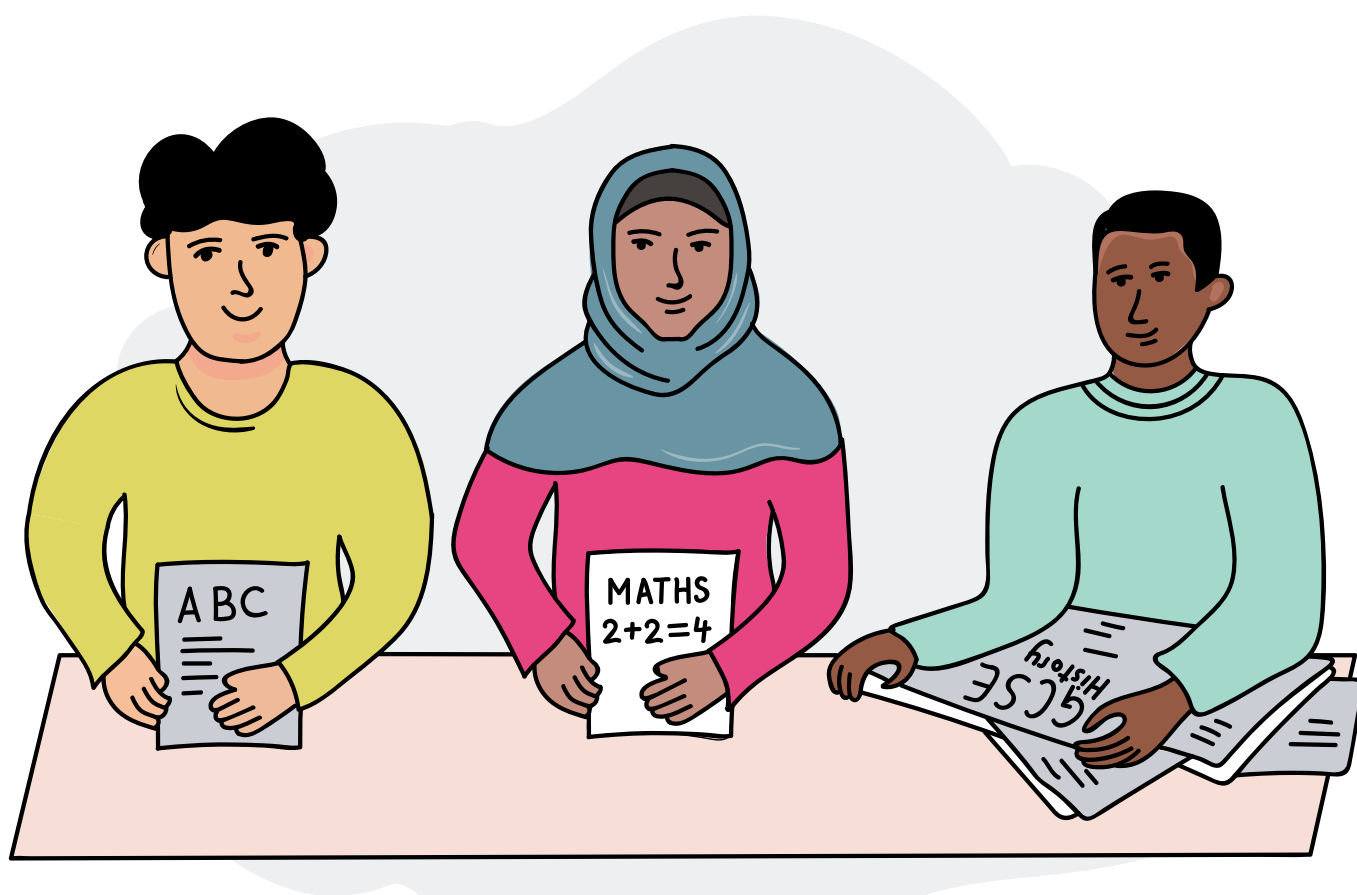


GCSE grade allocation 2021: Guidance for teachers



Introduction

Following the announcement by the Department for Education (DfE) that exams would be replaced with teacher assessment for the second year running due to the pandemic, schools and teachers are again preparing to allocate students grades. The recent publication of the [General Qualifications Alternative Awarding Framework \(GQAAF\)](#) and the [guidance](#) from Ofqual, are designed to assist schools in making decisions around how to apply this guidance within their setting in order to ensure that the grade allocated by teachers, “as far as possible, reflects what a student knows, understands and can do” and is drawn from robust evidence and thereby maintains the integrity and rigour expected of assessments.

The GQAAF and its implementation will have significant implications for all students. Research suggests that these implications are particularly important for those pupils who are new to English and those who entered the English school system late, for example in Years 10 and 11. This is because assessment of what a student “knows, understands and can do” may be limited by their Proficiency in English, and these pupils will not have had the time to develop their English language proficiency to a level that would enable them to access the curriculum and demonstrate their learning in the language of instruction (Hutchinson, 2018; Strand and Hessel, 2018).

The impact of the pandemic on schools, including closures, socially distanced classes and remote learning has impeded progress for many learners. Evidence from [Scotland](#) and [Jersey](#) suggests that learners using English as an Additional Language (EAL) were amongst the hardest hit groups. As well as experiencing learning loss over the last year, learners who use EAL may have experienced English language learning loss, more obviously where school is the main source of academic English modelling. Additionally, with fewer opportunities for social interaction during lockdown, the acquisition of social language, which allows access to academic language, will also have been slowed. There is, therefore, an urgent need for quality teaching to accelerate the recovery and to equip students to move on to the next stage of their education. Furthermore, strategies are needed to enable learners to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding of the curriculum in assessments.



About this paper:

The Bell Foundation has produced this paper to support teachers who have students using English as an Additional Language (EAL) in their examination groups this year. The paper supplements Ofqual's guidance by focusing specifically on how teacher assessed grades will affect students who use EAL. This paper signposts key considerations for teachers in ensuring a fair and equitable assessment process for students using EAL and explores strategies for equipping learners with the language and skills needed to demonstrate knowledge, understanding and ability in teacher-led assessments. In addition to this paper, The Bell Foundation has also published [guidance](#) aimed at Senior Leaders and EAL co-ordinators (or staff who carry out this role), as well as guidance for parents/carers, and EAL learners themselves.

Ofqual guidance: key considerations for learners using EAL

For a grade to reflect what a student “knows, understands and can do”, the assessment should be of their cognitive understanding of the curriculum and their ability to apply that knowledge. The means of assessment should aim to remove linguistic barriers which prevent students from demonstrating their ability. Ofqual's guidance also states that the grades awarded to a student “must reflect a fair, reasonable and carefully considered judgement of the student's performance across a range of evidence, on the curriculum content that they have been taught”. The strategies below are suggested with this guidance in mind.

1. **Assess students only on what they have been taught.** While it is imperative that students are “taught sufficient content to allow progression to the next stage of their education”, there will be no minimum requirement for content to be taught. This removes the pressure to address all gaps, which may have resulted in content being covered superficially, and further pressure being unnecessarily placed on students. This is particularly significant for students who may have also missed large sections of a course due to arriving in Key Stages 3 or 4; not only have new arrivals using EAL missed opportunities for curriculum learning, they have also had less time in which to develop the language necessary to demonstrate their understanding. In reaching decisions about final grades, assessment criteria will need to be carefully scrutinised; where a learner has never been taught certain skills, they cannot be assessed on them.
2. **Determine the grades as late as is practicable.** Select evidence from throughout the course as this will allow more time for teaching and learning and thereby not only provide the teacher with the scope to identify the best examples of learning, but also both reassure and motivate the students. It might be beneficial to:
 - Continue to teach the curriculum, using effective language support such as scaffolding and modelling in order to a) facilitate deep and meaningful learning, particularly in areas that might be of greater significance in subsequent stages of education and b) simultaneously support learners in developing their subject-related language proficiency.
 - Collect evidence from ongoing assessments, for example end-of-unit tests, in order to remove the requirement to retain vast amounts of technical vocabulary for final assessments.

3. Use a range of evidence. Where schools decide to use materials provided by examination boards, we strongly advise that this should not be the sole means of assessment for learners using EAL. The most useful evidence will be sufficiently nuanced to take account of variations in individual's circumstances. Similarly, while a teacher, or a centre, in assessing a whole class, may generally use the same sets of evidence to reach their final assessments, exceptions can be made. Teachers can draw on evidence from a "broad range" of sources which best demonstrate curriculum learning rather than linguistic ability. For example, teachers could:

- Draw on the expertise of other staff in the school, for example EAL co-ordinators and staff who can speak other languages. EAL professionals will be familiar with assessment of Proficiency in English and will be able to advise on how this impacts on a learner's ability to respond to the demands of a task. They will then be able to make further suggestions as to how tasks could be appropriately adapted or explained in order to increase accessibility.
- Draw on evidence from different domains (for example, speaking as well as writing) in order to recognise a learner's linguistic strengths. For example, a student may be more confident in speaking than they are in writing. Assessments based on spoken as well as written evidence are likely to provide a more accurate picture of the learner's full knowledge and ability to use the English language to demonstrate curriculum understanding.
- Ensure that the task types used to assess learning allow students to demonstrate subject knowledge without relying solely or mostly on pupils having to produce extended written texts, for example through short answers, spoken explanations, labelled diagrams or tables.
- Ensure students understand what is expected of them in the task. Instructions and questions should be adapted where necessary, for example to avoid the use of multiple clauses or overly complex structures. Visuals, such as pictures or diagrams, can be used to clarify meaning. AQA's guidance on [Making questions clear](#) provides further useful considerations.
- Where specific tasks, such as conventional exam papers, are to be set, consider providing them in advance so that students can spend some time familiarising themselves with the expectations and the language typically used.

4. Exercise flexibility in terms of conditions of assessment. According to [JCQ's](#) guidance on access arrangements, unless an additional learning need has been identified, only those students who have been in the country for under three years, regardless of Proficiency in English, are entitled to extra time, and this is only in some exams. However, with no requirement for formal assessment under examination conditions, schools should aim to create conditions most conducive to demonstrating learning, for example working in a familiar classroom, with their usual teachers, with sufficient time to complete a task, and with a bilingual dictionary where appropriate.

5. Assess students' performance objectively. Ofqual's [Information for centres about making objective judgements](#) reminds teachers that no factors other than evidence of knowledge, understanding and ability should affect the awarding of a grade. "These also include factors such as social background (including culture or family), socio-economic status, or perceived English language proficiency (where this is not relevant to the knowledge, skills and understanding being assessed)." The evidence shared in the [Equality Impact Assessment](#) from Ofqual demonstrates that students using 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 who use EAL. Low expectations of a student because of their language proficiency might hide their actual knowledge, skills and abilities. Using a range of evidence to reach a final grade, and engaging in robust moderation procedures, ideally with the guidance of an EAL specialist, will eliminate the risk of the subjective awarding of grades.

To ensure learners are equipped to show their ability in the assessments, and also to allow progression to the next stage of their education, the following strategies could be used:

- Capitalise on the subject knowledge learners may already have, including where that is in a home language. By establishing what a learner already knows, teaching and learning can shift the focus to language development to enable students to demonstrate their learning.
- Aim to keep parents and carers informed about the assessment process and how they can support their children by, for example, discussing curriculum content in home languages. Provide students and their families/carers with a plan detailing what content will be taught/assessed and when, so that they have the opportunity to prepare beforehand. The Bell Foundation has published [guidance](#) which provides further long-term suggestions and includes a number of translated guidance documents aimed at parents themselves.
- Explicitly teach the vocabulary and structures required to demonstrate understanding through certain text types.
- Explicitly model successful responses to typical tasks, particularly those requiring longer answers. Strategies such as [dictogloss](#) draw attention to the specific language required in certain responses.
- Provide opportunities for peer assessment in order to reinforce understanding of the assessment criteria, as well as the language and content required.

Many of these strategies will have a greater impact if embedded throughout a learner's education. Nevertheless, focusing on providing learners with the language and strategies needed to demonstrate understanding in preparation for teacher-led assessments will increase their chances of achieving their potential.

Students being assessed in 2021 have already suffered significant disruption to their education; using these strategies to increase a learner's ability to be fairly assessed, and at the same time make provision for the next stages in a learner's education, will go some way towards reducing the inequity in the assessment system.

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