

Grades without exams: explore practical challenges when preparing for grade appeals

Much can still be done now to help avoid or mitigate the burden of reviews, appeals and challenges relating to teacher-assessed grades.

30 June 2021

Schools will have already undertaken a huge amount of work as part of the process for determining GCSE/Level 2 and A Level/Level 3 grades without exams this year. The deadline for submission of final grades was 18 June and it would be understandable for schools to breathe a sigh of relief and now wait for what the results days on 10 and 12 August have in store. However, keep going if you can, as much can still be done now to help avoid or mitigate the burden of reviews, appeals and challenges relating to teacher-assessed grades.

Centre Review and Awarding Organisation Appeals

The Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) has now issued its guide to appeals processes for summer 2021. The guidance envisages that pupils will be able to request a review of their teacher-assessed grade(s) on the grounds that the school has:

- made an administrative error in relation to the result, or
- failed to follow its procedures properly or consistently in arriving at that result.

If pupils are not satisfied with the outcome of the review, they can require the school to submit an appeal on their behalf to the relevant awarding organisation on the above two grounds, or on the ground that their grade reflects an unreasonable exercise of academic judgement, either because of the way the grade has been determined and/or the selection of the evidence.

Timings vary, with priority being given to pupils applying to higher education who did not attain their first university or course choice.

Other issues and challenges

In addition to the review and appeals process, we know from last year that schools are also likely to face a raft of other issues and challenges relating to teacher-assessed grades, including:

- Subject access requests under the Data Protection Act
- Freedom of Information Act requests
- allegations of discrimination under the Equality Act
- complaints under the school's complaints policy for issues indirectly linked to the process
- staffing issues
- adverse reputational issues, including local media and social media.

Preparation: what should you do between now and results day?

So, what can schools do between now and the end of term or the results days to help avoid or mitigate challenges relating to teacher-assessed grades?

1. Checking (and double checking)

Your Centre Policy should set out your school's approach to assessment and quality assurance. As this will be a central piece of evidence in appeals, complaints and challenges, it's worth reminding yourself what you have already committed to, check that what has been done so far has been done properly and, crucially, that you have evidence readily available to show that it has been done so.

The JCQ guidance has a useful checklist at Appendix F for schools to use as part of this checking process. If errors or omissions have been made, then get these corrected now.

2. Early information-sharing

Experience from last year would suggest that taking a proactive approach to information sharing with pupils is the best way of reducing the administrative burden of personal data/information requests, reviews and appeals.

As a minimum, the JCQ guidance requires that pupils are given access to:

- the Centre Policy
- the sources of evidence used to determine their grade, along with the marks/grades associated with them
- details of any variations in evidence used, based on disruption to what they were taught, and
- details of any special circumstances that have been considered in determining their grade, e.g. access arrangements, reasonable adjustments or mitigating circumstances.

3. Prepare for Centre Reviews and Appeal Submissions, including appropriate resourcing

Make sure you have given thought to how your school will handle reviews and appeal requests in practice and document this into a clear procedure so that staff and pupils understand the process. Also consider having template letters ready to acknowledge receipt of review, appeal and personal data/information requests and to confirm the outcome of reviews and appeals, as anticipated by the JCQ guidance.

Finally, give thought now to the resourcing of reviews and appeals. Who will you need over the summer period to deal with the first wave of reviews and appeals? What resources can you draw on early in the Autumn term to handle other requests, reviews, appeals and challenges?

Additional support

To support you with preparing for appeals and challenges, and related personal data/information requests, we have developed our 'Teacher-Assessed Grades Support Pack'. The pack contains valuable supporting materials and template letters which complement and build on JCQ guidance and will assist the school to be confident and well prepared for the results days.

As always, do contact us if you have any queries or want to know more.

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