

FAQs: A level, GCSE and VTQ Results 2022

Introduction

These FAQs are designed for ASCL members to answer questions about results this year, and to support communications with staff, governors and trustees, students, parents and carers.

NB – this iteration of the document is written pre-results day. Please check the ASCL website (www.ascl.org.uk/exams2022) for an updated version once each set of results are published.

How were grades arrived at this year?

In 2020 and 2021 results nationally rose, especially the number of candidates achieving As and A*s at A level. This was due to the different type of assessment used. As 2022 was the first year exams were held, the government had to decide how to approach grading. It decided that the fairest system was a transition year between 2021 national results and 2019 national results.

This means that results for each qualification will roughly be around the midpoint although this won't be exact.

Were students marked more harshly than last year?

No. It is important to remember the difference between marking and grading. This year, exam board markers marked papers in *exactly the same way, using the same mark schemes* as they had done previously (2019 and before).

Once enough marks were received, exam boards then set grade boundaries in line with the policy above. This means that grade boundaries are likely to be lower than the last time they were set (2019) to allow for more students than normal to achieve each grade.

The grade boundaries for each qualification will be released on results days.

Does this mean grades were arrived at by algorithm?

No. Ultimately, the starting point for a student's grade is the work they produce in the exam. Their marks across all their papers are then compared to other candidates' marks nationally. As above, grade boundaries are then set by the exam boards who were asked to aim for a midpoint between 2019 and 2021 grades.

However, experienced examiners and subject leads in the boards could, as in a normal year, argue that the performance of candidates is stronger, and so more candidates can achieve higher grades.

This is unlikely to have happened this year, as grading was already more generous than normal exam years.

How is this fair to students who have been so affected by the pandemic?

It's important to remember that all students taking exams this year are in the same boat. A range of other mitigations to reflect lost learning were put in place (see below). For the purpose of selection (e.g. university and apprenticeship admissions), all students in this year's cohort have been graded in the same way. Universities understand the approach this

year and will not seek to make comparisons between candidates who received grades in 2021 and this year's cohort.

The ongoing impact of the pandemic will not have been equal across candidates, even within a single school, college or trust, or even within a single class. It would therefore have been impossible to try to adjust marking or grading at an individual level.

What other mitigations were put in place?

As well as more generous grading compared to a normal year, the exam boards provided:

- advanced information about what was or wasn't on the exam paper, which was released in the spring
- formula and equation sheets in some STEM subjects
- less content and optionality in GCSE English literature, history and geography
- changes to coursework and practical work in some subjects

Will more students miss out on their conditional offer?

There has been some unhelpful speculation in the media that more students may miss out on their conditional offers this year. There is little reason to think this. Universities were aware of how grading would work this year before they made offers and have been cautious in their offer-making. Universities have not raised their standard tariffs, unless they were planning to anyway. Students already have their offers. As in any year, some students will be disappointed with their grades and may not make the conditions of their offer, however, there is no reason to suggest that this would be any higher than normal. In fact, in Scotland, more students than ever got their first choice of university.

Is there more competition for university places this year?

There was greater competition for universities this year, but this is because there are more 18 year-olds in the population and more students than ever before applied for university. However, this is not linked to exams or grading. Offers have already been made, and a vast majority have been accepted.

Will a school's or college's previous results count against them in the transition year?

Absolutely not. The midpoint between 2019 and 2021 is set at a national level and has nothing to do with a school, college or trust's own results.

School, college, and trusts' results for 2022 will be based on the performance of their students during the exam period.

Will some schools or colleges see a bigger drop in results from 2021 than others?

There is no such thing as school performance data for 2021 or 2020 as the DfE decided not to publish it. If schools or colleges chose to self-publish their students' results in these years, then any drop in results can be explained by the different form of assessment.

The DfE and Ofsted do not have or use school- or college-level data from 2020 or 2021.

What data will be published for secondary schools and colleges this year?

All of the normal data and performance measures will be calculated and published for secondary schools and colleges this year, something ASCL has lobbied against.

The exception is 16-18 progress figures (including English and maths) as the 2020 baseline data is not available.

This will be published on the Find School and College Performance website, on ASP and on Ofsted's IDSR.

Can you compare results to previous years?

The DfE has cautioned against trying to compare this year's results with pre-pandemic results. The impact of the pandemic has been variable between schools and between students which makes comparisons very difficult. This is reflected in the DfE changing the name of the website from 'Compare School and College Performance' to 'Find School and College Performance'.

Governors, trustees and senior leaders should be cautious of using this year's data to look for patterns and trends, and for setting or reviewing performance management targets.