

Emerging principles and guidance regarding teacher-assessed grades for summer 2020

Following the decision that no public examinations will take place during this summer, school and college leaders and teachers are beginning to address how the process of assigning teacher-assessed grades to pupils will operate. We recognise that the actual grades issued will be subject to a centralised process that may modify the grade provided to the WJEC by the teacher. ASCL Cymru is in close contact with Qualifications Wales, Welsh Government and awarding organisations on a regular basis as this process is hammered out.

There are a number of important principles to bear in mind regarding this process.

The government has determined that schools and colleges will not be held to account for their performance based on this summer's teacher-assessed grades. It is essential, therefore, that school and college leaders and teachers put headline measures out of their minds when approaching this exercise. It is entirely about ensuring the students receive the grade they would most likely have achieved if they sat the exams. The principle is that pupils' own lives are as unaffected as possible. It is not about school ranking.

We would expect that the national picture for teacher-assessed grades will be similar to that which would have occurred if the students concerned had actually taken their exams. It is understandable that teachers might want to give more students the benefit of the doubt by, for example, awarding more C grades than they might otherwise have obtained. But this would be wrong for several reasons:

- Awarding organisations and Qualifications Wales will take steps to ensure that grade distributions do indeed match previous years. Where centres produce grades which seem particularly generous, a moderation process will be applied.
- Assuming that things head back to normal for the 2021 cohort, an inflated picture in 2020 would disadvantage those students currently in Year 10 and Year 12. They have enough to contend with having had their own studies disrupted.
- This is an opportunity for the profession as a whole to show that it can, and will, produce reasonable grades through the process of teacher assessment. For those who believe that the current system of examinations at 16 is inappropriate there is a chance here to show that an alternative universe is possible.

The process of allocating grades to students has some difficult ethical issues associated with it. We know that there are historic differences in performance between girls and boys, between disadvantaged pupils and their non-disadvantaged peers and so on. For this reason, teachers should ask themselves the question "What grade would this particular student most plausibly have achieved if they were taking the exam?". This is not to be confused with a target grade, which might have an inflationary effect if used instead. Whilst we should as a profession be exercised about the inequalities which are present in the system, this is not the moment or the method to put it right.

We would therefore suggest the process teachers should use to address this task is as follows:

- a) For each pupil, consider what grade would be the most plausible if they were actually going to take the exam in the summer.
- b) Rank order the students within those grades, so that if the gradings need to be adjusted, then it is clear which pupils would be affected, in either direction. This is a difficult process and relies on teachers being fair and reasonable with their own pupils but also understanding the same process is being applied everywhere else.
- c) Finally, consider whether the cohort of pupils and their grades taken together would be what you would have expected on results day taking into account whether that individual subject in that school performs above or below national average.

On a practical note, ASCL Cymru would advise teachers and leaders that they should not be seeking any further work from students at this point to support teacher-assessed grades. Not all students will be able to respond; some will be ill whilst others will be living under more difficult circumstances at home. We believe the priorities for pupils in Year 11 and 13 are to ensure that they complete the curriculum in the subjects which they wish to pursue in the following year, not to add collateral to the assessment process.

More details will emerge about how this process will work. There is no need to rush; what is important is that the process is well thought through and works in the best interest of students. We greatly appreciate that many of our members have their own ideas and concerns about all of this. We would like to reassure all of them that everyone involved is working very hard and with great sensitivity to make this fair. Above all, this process will only work if the profession works together in a consistent, fair and ethical way. The students affected by this deserve nothing less.

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