

You may have seen headlines on 29 September regarding decisions that have been made about exams in summer 2023. I am writing to explain more fully what this means for students preparing for GCSEs and VTQs this year.

The government, the exams regulator Ofqual and the exam boards have confirmed the following:

- At a national level, grades will be in line with grades in 2019. This was always likely to be the case this year, after a one-year transition year when exams returned in 2022.
- However, there will be a safety net to ensure that, nationally, grades are not lower than they were in 2019.
- This means that, generally speaking, students have the same chance of getting a grade 9 or 5 at GCSE, as in 2019.
- Exams in vocational and technical qualifications will also return to a 2019 grade profile.
- Formula sheets will be provided in the GCSE maths, physics and combined sciences exams, meaning that students will not need to memorise these formulae or equations.
- Advanced information about where to focus revision, which was provided in 2022, will **not** be provided this year. Students will need to learn and revise the whole specification as normal. Any topic could come up in the exam.
- If a student has studied the whole course but is ill during the exam period they may be able to receive a grade by sitting one paper in the qualification rather than the previous rule of 25% of the assessment, although certification of illness will be needed.
- The exam boards are currently consulting on the exam timetable. In most qualifications, there is at least a week between the first and last exam paper to ensure that if students are ill for one paper they are able to sit another.

They are also consulting on what contingency arrangements to take this year in case exams are cancelled in summer 2023. Unlike last year, there is not an expectation that we collect evidence at three points throughout the year. When this decision is made by government, subject teachers will confirm what work, if any, would be used if exams are cancelled.

FAQs

Is it fair to return to 2019 grading?

Last year, the Department for Education and Ofqual announced their intention to return to a national pre-pandemic grade profile in summer 2023, so we were aware this was coming.

The decision means that, at a national level, grades will be roughly the same as they were in 2019 (pre-pandemic).

However, the government has put an additional safety net in place to ensure that, overall, grades in 2023 are not lower than in 2019. Because this cohort of students' learning was affected by the pandemic (although they weren't subject to national school closures during their course, unlike the previous three cohorts), we might expect the standard of work in exams to be lower than in 2019. However, the safety net will ensure that, overall, grades are not lower than in 2019, even if the quality of work is lower at a national level.

Colleges, universities and apprenticeship-providers are aware of the changing grade profile year on year and will factor this into their decision making. Because students are largely competing for places with other students in the same year, they are not disadvantaged by this policy.

Why were grades in 2020 – 2022 higher than normal?

In 2020, schools and colleges were asked to provide a centre-assessed-grade for students. Initially, these were then rounded up or down by an algorithm. After that, the initial centre-assessed-grade was used. This was during the national lockdown.

In 2021, schools and colleges were asked to provide a teacher-assessed grade based on the work that students produced throughout their course. Because the nature of the assessment was different, and schools were told to give students the benefit of the doubt when they were between two grades, this saw a higher proportion of students nationally achieve top grades and pass grades than in normal exam years.

In 2022, the government decided to have a transition year, with grades nationally at a midpoint between 2019 and 2021. At a national level, this is what happened in the summer.

What if I or my child has been particularly affected by Covid-19?

There is no current provision to give a different grade if a student has been particularly affected by Covid. The best thing students can do is to catch up with any learning they may have lost, and to talk to their teachers about any aspects of the subject they don't understand or may have misconceptions about.

Students and teachers are no longer encouraged to test themselves for Covid. If students have symptoms, they are encouraged to isolate for three days (five days for teachers), so the impact of any Covid-related illness is likely to be a week at most.

Students may be able to receive special consideration if they are ill for one or more exam in the summer, but they must have studied the whole course to be eligible for this.

Other long-term illnesses should be discussed with your subject teacher or pastoral or academic lead.

What other adaptations are in place?

Formula sheets in GCSE maths, physics and combined science will continue. Subject teachers will use these sheets throughout the year so that students become familiar with them and how to use them.

The other adaptations that were in place for 2022 are not due to continue into the 2023 summer exam series. This includes a reduction in content for GCSE English literature, history, ancient history and geography, and advanced information in all other GCSE and A level subjects, and changes to the course in some vocational or technical subjects.

This means that students must learn and revise the full content for each qualification they are taking.

How can we best prepare for exams next summer?

The best way of getting ready for next summer's exams is simple: full attendance; trying hard every day; completing all classwork and homework; revising regularly; acting on feedback and marking from teachers; and reading around your subject or asking for extension work.

Every teacher in our school/college will be able to advise you on what makes a successful student of their subject and will be happy to discuss this with you.

If you have any further general questions please exams@wadebridge.cornwall.sch.uk and we will be able to advise you. We all wish you the best of luck over the coming year, and hope you continue to work hard.