

A-level results 2020 FAQs document

Produced by SSAT, the Schools, Students and Teachers network

This document is written for students, parents, carers, teachers, school leaders and governors and trustees, as is intended to be used by SSAT member schools to help myth-bust some of the rumours around this year's A-level and AS level results. This document represents the views of SSAT and no other organisation or department.

How were grades awarded this year?

For most qualifications, including all A-levels and AS level, grades have been awarded using a three part process:

1. *Centre-assessed grades* – where students' subject teachers use a range of evidence including mock exam results, classwork, homework and their knowledge of the student to determine, in their professional opinion, the most likely grade a student would have received had they sat the exams.
2. *Rank order* – schools were asked to rank order each student within a grade within each subject from most secure to least secure. Students were not allowed to know their centre-assessed grade or rank order before results day.
3. *Standardisation* – all students' centre-assessed grades were put through a national standardisation formula to ensure that this year's grades carry the same weight as previous grades and future grades. This standardisation adjusted for the usual expected distribution of grades, the previous attainment of the cohort, and the school's most recent performance.

This results in a so-called 'calculated grade' – i.e. the grade students receive from the exam boards on results day.

Does this mean students' results were created by algorithm?

To some extent, yes, as the third part of the process involves a standardisation formula. However, the basis of the grading is the centre-assessed grade determined by the student's teacher. Most students will receive either the grade they were given or one grade higher or lower.

In normal years, exam results are also standardised before grades are given. While this year is different, standardisation of raw scores into grades is not new.

What if a student doesn't get the grades they hoped for / needed?

The focus in this extraordinary year has to be on student's progression and transition to the next stage of education.

If a student has met the entry requirements for their first-choice university, college, apprenticeship or work placement, even if their grades were not what they hoped for, they should focus on the next stage of their lives and spend time preparing for this exciting new chapter.

If a student has not met the entry requirements though calculated grades, the first step should be to speak to their university / college / apprenticeship as soon as possible. Everyone understands this year is exceptional and many providers are likely to be more flexible on entry requirements.

If the student's first choice university is not as flexible, the student should speak to their tutor, subject teacher, or other designated staff member in school about their next options.

Can student's choose their mock grade over the calculated grade they receive?

No, they can't. This has been widely misreported in the media.

In *some* instances students *may* be able to use a past valid mock exam grade as the basis for an appeal, but this is not the same as choosing to use a mock grade given by the school.

The government, and the exams' regulator Ofqual, have not yet defined what will count as a valid mock grade. It may require students to have sat an entire set of A-level papers under normal exam conditions. This is often not what is described as 'mock exams' in many schools.

When Ofqual define the criteria for what a valid mock is, only teachers themselves will know whether the mock exam grade given would be valid – individual students will not necessarily know this. A mock grade given by the school may not be sufficiently valid for an appeal.

Should students appeal the grade?

If students have been able to progress onto their first-choice of further study, training, or employment, then an appeal is likely to be very unhelpful. Instead, they should focus on preparing for this next stage of their lives.

If a student does want to appeal, they must remember that neither they themselves nor their parents can appeal directly to the exam board. All appeals must be made by the school on behalf of the student.

Therefore the first step is to discuss the possibility of an appeal with the school. The school will know, based on the guidance, whether an appeal is likely to be successful. The decision to appeal or not ultimately rests with the school.

What about the autumn series?

Another option available is to sit any of the A-level or AS exams in the autumn, probably in October. Results are planned to be published before Christmas. The autumn exams are available in all subjects.

Again, students who have been able to progress onto further study should consider this option carefully. It is likely to be very disruptive to their further education if they need to relearn and revise for qualifications they may not have been taught since March.

What is the triple-lock?

The triple-lock is a new term used by the government to describe the three stages of receiving the calculated grade on results day; a possible appeals process; and the autumn exams.

For a majority of students, the first grade will be sufficient to move onto further study or training. Appeals and autumn exams should only be considered as a last-resort, and a majority of students will not need to go down this route.

The triple-lock means that if students do appeal a grade, or sit exams in the autumn, they will also receive the highest of any of the grades – meaning they do not lose their calculated grade by appealing it or sitting exams.

However, it is not a case of 'choosing' a grade. Appeals and autumn exams may put significant pressure and stress on students.

Even when students are disappointed, but are able to move onto their first choice of future study, they should focus on the next stage of their lives.

More questions?

In the first instance students and parents should talk to the school. More guidance if needed is available at ofqual.gov.uk. As your school is a member of SSAT, your leaders and teachers can also use the SSAT network for advice and guidance.