

GCSEs, AS and A levels

a guide for students
in England

ofqual

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Ofqual is the qualifications regulator in England. We decide which organisations can offer GCSEs, AS and A levels and set rules that exam boards must follow.

Who's who in the exam system?



The [Department for Education](#) sets:

- the subject content that GCSEs, AS and A levels must cover
- policy for what maintained schools are expected to teach
- measures to judge schools' performance



Exam boards develop, mark and award GCSEs, AS and A level qualifications. There are currently four exam boards: [AQA](#), [OCR](#), [Pearson](#) and [WJEC Eduqas](#).

Schools and colleges

are responsible for teaching and learning, and preparing you to take the qualifications. They make sure all the right arrangements are in place for you to take qualifications, give you your results and provide support, if needed, once you have received your results.



[JCQ](#) is the exam boards' membership organisation. Exam boards use JCQ to set common policies and procedures that schools and colleges must follow when delivering GCSEs, AS and A levels.

Who should I speak to?

Before exams

Your **school or college** will decide:

- the range of subjects you can choose from and which qualifications they will enter you for
- whether they will enter you for foundation or higher tier for GCSEs that are tiered (maths, science, statistics and Modern Foreign Languages). You can find out [more about tiering here](#)
- whether, because you have a disability including a learning disability, they should apply for reasonable adjustments on your behalf
- if, because you are injured or taken ill shortly before the exam, you should be given some extra support in the way you take your assessment, such as a scribe who will write your answer down for you
- whether you might qualify for a small number of extra marks, for example because of illness or injury affecting you or someone very close to you

[Reasonable adjustments](#) are changes made to an assessment or to the way an assessment is carried out that reduce or remove a disadvantage caused by a student's disability. Some of the most common adjustments are:

- changes to assessment materials, for example, large print or braille exam papers
- assistance with specific tasks, for example, another person might read questions to you or write your dictated answers
- extra time to complete assessments

Your school or college can also request that the exam board [take account of something](#) that could affect how you'd be expected to perform in an assessment. The exam board will decide whether an adjustment should be made to the way your exams are taken or if you should be given a small number of extra marks.

During exams

Your **school or college** will make sure that:

- exam papers are stored securely
- any reasonable adjustments or other changes allowed to the way you take your exams are in place
- exams are administered properly

If you think that an exam has [not been conducted properly](#) or you think that some students have had an unfair advantage, you should raise this with your exams officer, a teacher or a family member. If you would rather not talk to your school or college, you can contact the relevant exam board or Ofqual.

Exams boards are responsible for the qualifications that you take, including developing and delivering the exam papers.

If you are concerned that there was an error in an exam paper or that you didn't have fair access to it, you should contact your school or college.

Exam boards must test all the content set out in their specifications over a number of years and must not ask questions on anything not included in the specifications. If you have concerns you should speak to your teacher.

Who should I speak to?

Marking and moderation

Exam boards [mark students' exam scripts](#). Around 63,000 examiners, mostly experienced teachers, do most of their marking on-screen. This means different answers on your exam paper may be given to different examiners to mark, unlike paper-based marking. Examiners' work is quality checked by the exam boards to ensure their marking is consistent and to the required standard.

Exam boards [must moderate work that teachers have marked](#) so they can make sure marking is accurate and consistent between teachers across all schools and colleges. Exam boards do this by taking a sample of work that the school or college has marked. Your work might not be in the sample.

Exam boards use the sample to check if the school's or college's marking is in line with the national standard. If it isn't, they must adjust the marks given to you and everyone who has taken that qualification in your school or college, to make sure you all receive accurate marks.

What your **school or college** does:

Your teacher may mark some of the work you do for your qualification when you are assessed by non-exam assessment. For example, in GCSE Art & Design, GCSE Drama or A level Design & Technology, your artwork, performance or the product you have designed must be marked by a teacher.

Where your teacher has marked your assessment, you are entitled to know the marks your teacher has given you. If you do not think the mark you have got is correct, your school or college must allow you to request a review of your teacher's marking before your marks are submitted to the exam board. Your work will be reviewed by someone who has not previously been involved in the marking.

Who should I speak to?

Results and post-results

Your **school or college**:

- receives your results and will pass these onto you. If you believe that there has been an error in the marking of your work, you should discuss this with your school or college
- can apply for a review of marking on your behalf
- can apply for a review of moderation for work that was originally marked by your teacher where the mark they gave was changed by the exam board. This review is for all students taking the qualification at your school or college, not just for you

The **exam board** will carry out a review of marking or moderation if a request is made by your **school or college** by the deadline, 19 September for summer 2019.

If you are a private candidate (someone who does not study for their qualification at a school or college but takes the exam or assessment at an exam board approved school or college) you can contact the exam board directly to ask for a review.

On review, if no marking or moderation errors are found then your marks will not change. If a marking error is found then your mark may go up or down. If your mark does change, the review could mean that your grade stays the same or goes up or down. An exam board cannot provide extra marks because you are close to a grade boundary or because you did not get the grade your school or college predicted.

For a review of moderation, your grade will not go down as a result of the review. This is because the review affects many students, and schools and colleges may not be able to get permission from everyone for a review to take place.

If you and your school or college still have concerns after the review of marking or moderation, [exam boards must offer an appeals process](#). This gives your school or college the opportunity to challenge the review of marking or moderation decisions. They can also challenge exam boards' decisions about reasonable adjustments, extra support or malpractice.

Who should I speak to?

Complaints

Ofqual

Ofqual's role during and after exams is to [maintain standards](#) of the qualifications over time and across exam boards.

You [might come to Ofqual if you want to complain](#) that an exam board hasn't followed our rules or its own published policies and procedures for its qualifications. We would usually expect you to have complained to the exam board before coming to us, to give the exam board an opportunity to resolve your complaint.

Making a complaint to Ofqual is not the route to follow if you want to request a review of marking. If you think there has been a marking error, you must use the exam board's review process instead.

If you and your school or college are unhappy with the result of an appeal following a review of marking, the school or college can ask Ofqual to review the case. This is called the [exam procedure review service \(EPRS\)](#). We look at whether the exam board has followed our rules and its own procedures, and, if not, whether your result is inappropriate.

If you have a question about any of the qualifications you are taking then speaking to your teacher or exams officer is usually the best place to start.

Further information and links:

There is lots more information on our website that you might find helpful.

[Ofqual guide for schools and colleges](#): regulating GCSEs, AS and A levels.

[Ask Ofqual](#): common questions answered: videos giving guidance on common questions we receive

[Ofqual postcards](#): summary information about GCSE, AS and A level reforms

[Ofqual blog](#): we publish regular blog posts, [sign up here to receive updates](#)

[Contact](#): if you need further information or want to make a complaint please contact us

You can access the online version of this guide at www.gov.uk/ofqual