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News story

Grading continues as normal this summer in England

Marking and grading are happening as normal this summer and this will continue in future years.

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One of Ofqual's key responsibilities is ensuring that qualification standards are set and maintained appropriately. This means that students can be confident in their qualifications. The grades they achieve have currency and can be trusted, both now and in the future.

This is why the return to normal grading last year was so important. Grades should reflect what students know, understand and can do. They

provide evidence that students have the knowledge and skills to enable them to progress to the next stage of their lives.

Marking and grading are happening as normal this summer and this will continue in future years. As in any year, students' exams are being marked anonymously by expert examiners. Non-exam assessments are, as usual, being marked by teachers and checked by exam board moderators, or marked by expert examiners.

For external exams, grade boundaries are set after students have taken the assessments and once marking is nearly complete. Senior examiners recommend grade boundaries based on a range of judgemental and technical evidence. Grade boundaries typically change each year to make sure the standard of work needed for each grade remains stable and to reflect any differences in the difficulty of the assessments. For vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs), some assessments are graded directly, using pre-set criteria.

This summer, we expect overall results for GCSEs and A levels to be broadly similar to summer 2023. It's normal for results to vary a little each year due to changes in the cohort of students taking particular qualifications, and based on how students perform in their assessments.

For VTQs, new Tech Awards that are taken alongside GCSEs are being awarded for the first time this year, as are some Technical Qualifications within T Levels. As with other new qualifications, students and teachers may be less familiar with the new assessments, so Ofqual has asked awarding organisations to consider this when setting grade boundaries.

As part of Ofqual's role to ensure that standards are set and maintained appropriately, we carefully consider evidence to inform our approach. This summer we are requiring awarding organisations to make some adjustments to grading standards in 3 GCSE subjects – computer science, French and German. These adjustments will have a small impact on results in these subjects. As the changes are small, and only relate to 3 subjects, we still

expect overall GCSE results to be similar to summer 2023.

GCSE computer science

GCSE computer science is a relatively new qualification that was first awarded in 2012. Since then, there have been some changes to the qualification, and the cohort has rapidly increased. Given this, and following representations from stakeholders, Ofqual conducted [an extensive programme of research considering grading standards over time](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-standards-in-gcse-computer-science/a-review-of-standards-in-gcse-computer-science) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-standards-in-gcse-computer-science/a-review-of-standards-in-gcse-computer-science>).

GCSE computer science is unusual because of the changes that have occurred within the short lifespan of the qualification. Changes to the design of a qualification, the context within which it is operating, and the nature of its entry can introduce challenges in effectively maintaining standards.

Our research suggests that standards may have become slightly more stringent through the period from 2014 to 2019. This is likely due to the changes to the qualification and the context, during this period. Our analyses also suggests that any changes within a single year were likely to be very small. As such, it is unlikely that these changes could have been detected by awarding organisations when setting grade boundaries for their qualifications. These changes are not, therefore, because of a failure of awarding organisations' oversight through the awarding process.

[Having carefully considered the research findings, we think there is sufficient evidence to make a small adjustment to grading standards](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-standards-in-gcse-computer-science/gcse-computer-science-regulatory-summary) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-review-of-standards-in-gcse-computer-science/gcse-computer-science-regulatory-summary>). We are therefore requiring exam boards to reflect the research findings when setting grade boundaries in GCSE computer science this summer and award more generously at grades 9, 7 and 4.

GCSE French and German

Ofqual decided in 2019 to [better align grading standards in GCSE French and German with Spanish](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/inter-subject-comparability-in-gcse-modern-foreign-languages) (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/inter-subject-comparability-in-gcse-modern-foreign-languages>), following the conclusion of an extensive programme of work considering inter-subject comparability. We required exam boards to award more generously at grades 9, 7 and 4 in GCSE French and German in summer 2023. We also set out our intention to review this to consider whether any further adjustments were needed.

Following these adjustments, there is greater alignment between GCSE French, German and Spanish than prior to the pandemic. We were always clear that any adjustment might be phased over more than one year, and we are therefore requiring exam boards to make a further positive adjustment this summer in GCSE German (grades 9, 7 and 4), and GCSE French (grades 7 and 4). We are not requiring exam boards to make a further adjustment at grade 9 in GCSE French, since the evidence suggests that there was broad alignment with Spanish in summer 2023.

Making these small adjustments supports Ofqual's role to secure qualification standards.

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