

# 'Exams officer update September 2021 – school-assessed grades' webinar script

**Wednesday 15 September 2021**

<b>Content</b>
<b>Slide 1: Holding screen</b>
<b>Slide 2: Welcome screen</b>
<b>Slide 3: Can you hear me?</b> First let me check you can hear me through a quick poll: Can everyone hear me? Yes or no?
<b>Slide 4: Participant boxes</b> Next let's have a look at the participant boxes that you can use during this webinar.
<b>Slide 5: Introduction</b>
<b>Slide 6: What we are covering today (video timestamps in brackets)</b> In this presentation we will be covering the following subjects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>The basis for school-assessed grades (04:23)</b> We will provide some background and the rationale for our approach to the November 2021 series.</li><li>• <b>Key dates (10:51)</b> Explaining the timelines for delivering school-assessed grades in November 2021.</li><li>• <b>How to gather evidence to set school-assessed grades (14:19)</b> An outline of what to use and how you can bring the pieces of work together.</li><li>• <b>Evidence requirements (17:00)</b> What sort of thing we would expect to see in a portfolio of evidence.</li><li>• <b>How to set grades using the portfolio of evidence (24:07)</b> Converting the three pieces of work into an overall grade.</li><li>• <b>The Rationale Document (35:09)</b></li><li>• <b>Next steps (51:38)</b> What is coming up, plus the opportunity for you to ask us questions.</li></ul> <p>If you used school-assessed grades in June 2021, much of this content might be familiar to you. Some schools are using school-assessed grades for the first time in November 2021. If you have used them before, we appreciate your patience while we go through the details for new users.</p>

## **Slide 7: Background**

### **Slide 8: Background**

The Covid-19 pandemic continues to affect teaching, learning and assessment, and the lives of teachers, students and their families.

For the small number of countries, and regions within countries, where directives from national or local authorities make it impossible for exams to go ahead, we will switch from exams to a school assessment approach using candidate work, as we did in June 2021.

Schools do not take this decision to move to school-assessed grades themselves – they are taken at country or regional level after careful analysis of the local situation. If you are attending this webinar but are not sure whether your school will be using school-assessed grades in November 2021, we strongly recommend you get in touch with either your regional representative or our Customer Services team.

All schools using school-assessed grades should have received a direct communication from us, or from our partners such as the British Council, to confirm the switch.

When a school is moved to the school-assessed grades approach this applies to all their entries. Any adjustments or exemptions your school may have applied for are no longer relevant.

Grades will be based on the level of achievement demonstrated by the candidate in work they have done. This will allow them to progress in the next stage of their education and in their lives.

The process we are using for November 2021 school-assessed grades is very similar to that used in June 2021. There is one change to the guidance, which is around the use of multiple-choice question papers, and we will talk about that shortly. Otherwise, our approach should feel very familiar and our guidance will build on what we learned from the June 21 series.

### **Slide 9: What we learned from June 2021**

So, what did we learn from the June 21 series?

We asked schools! As you know, we offered school-assessed grades across a range of countries in June 2021. After this we sent schools a survey so we could understand and learn from their experiences.

Schools found it challenging to put together portfolios of evidence for the first time, especially where schools were closed very close to exam dates. This meant that schools had been focused on preparing for exams and suddenly had to adapt to the alternative. For that reason, we want to give schools as much notice as possible about what is required if exams cannot go ahead.

Schools also asked us not to drip-feed information about the requirements, so we are publishing as much as we can now, so you fully understand what is needed.

We had questions from schools about certain syllabuses or scenarios. You can find advice on these in Appendix B of our main guide for collecting and using evidence.

We were really pleased that, when it came to the quality assurance process, the vast majority of schools set overall grades which accurately reflected the level of the students' work. We guided schools to make adjustments to grades if we felt their grading was not correct, but this was a very rare occurrence.

## Slide 10: Using school-assessed grades

Once you move to school-assessed grades, there is some exam-related administration that you no longer need to do. If you have already done some of these things you do not need to do anything further.

- Any existing applications for adjustments or exemptions are no longer valid. If you cannot determine a student's achievement on part of the syllabus due to the pandemic – for example, if they have not been able to do group work – you can explain this in the Rationale Document, which we will talk about later.
- You do not need to apply to us for access arrangements. However, you should give appropriate access arrangements, such as extra time or enlarged copies of the paper, to eligible students when they complete past papers, mock exams and work made up of questions from past papers that you intend to use as evidence of their performance for school-assessed grades. This will make sure the work reflects the candidate's usual way of working. Please keep records of any access arrangements that were used throughout the year and will be used in any mock exams. You must be confident that any evidence of a candidate's need supports the need for these arrangements. If you would like us to review a sample of the evidence of the candidate's need, we would be happy to do so.
- You do not need to submit any coursework, speaking tests or other non-examined assessments to us. Instead, you should keep and use this work as evidence when you decide on a candidate's school-assessed grade.
- You do not need to submit forecast grades and internally assessed marks for moderated components on Direct.
- You do not need to submit special consideration applications for any exams that you have managed to hold at your centre.
- Finally, you do not need to submit attendance registers to us.

## Slide 11: Key dates

Here are the key dates for school-assessed grades in the November 2021 series.

**16 August:** This was the first-time entry deadline for the November series. However, you can still make late entries and amendments until 21 September, which is the late entry deadline. Please remember we will charge you a late fee for new entries or changes to entry options – you can still make changes to candidate details, such as spelling errors or date of birth without charge.

**25 November:** We have extended our withdrawal deadline to 25 November 2021, and we will not charge a withdrawal fee. Until 21 September you can withdraw candidates yourself using Direct. After 21 September, please email us so we can arrange the withdrawal and credit for you.

**11 October:** Grade Submission System open to set up new users. This is when your school will be able to access the system to add new users, such as new exams officers or Heads of Centre. As the Head of Centre will need to submit the grades to us, it is important that they have an account on the system.

**18 October:** Grade Submission window opens. This is when you can begin entering the grades you are awarding to students.

Quality assurance process begins. As soon as we receive grades from you, we can start our quality assurance checks. This will be done in a similar way to June 2021, and we will confirm the exact process in a few weeks' time.

**18 November:** Grade Submission window closes. This gives you a month to submit all your grades.

Cambridge International AS & A Level results are due to be released on Monday 10 January 2022 and Cambridge IGCSE and O Level on Tuesday 18 January 2022. We will run a November 2021 Results webinar on Wednesday 8 December.

### **Slide 12: Finding guidance for November 2021**

We know that in June some schools felt that the supporting information for school-assessed grades took many forms and could be found in many places.

For November 2021, we have consolidated all the guidance in one document. This means it is a large document but it really is a one-stop guide for collecting and using evidence, complete with supporting appendices. It is easier to navigate using internal links and is searchable, which we hope will help you find everything you need. It also includes new information for candidates who have a school-assessed grade from June 2021 and want to resit the syllabus in November.

You can find this guidance document on our website: [www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-collecting-evidence](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-collecting-evidence)

### **Slide 13: Gathering evidence**

#### **Slide 14: Gathering evidence**

We are now going to move on to information about the pieces of evidence that should make up a student's portfolio of work. If you find that we have not answered your query, please feel free to ask in the Q&A at the end of this presentation.

- Each portfolio should contain three pieces of work.

For each candidate, put together a portfolio of three substantial pieces of evidence so you can make an assessment for each syllabus. Candidates in the same cohort can submit different pieces of work. Each piece of work should represent at least one hour of work by the candidate. One hour is the minimum amount of time we expect for candidates to produce a substantial piece of work that meets the requirements for the portfolio. The exceptions to this time requirement are past papers and specimen papers that we have published. You can submit these as one substantial piece of work for the relevant syllabus in the student portfolio.

- The piece of work must be within the content and assessment objectives of the relevant syllabus.

Coverage should be as broad as possible. For example, where syllabus content is organised into topics, the three pieces of work in a portfolio should be on different topics. Where the candidate was unable to cover particular assessment objectives due to Covid-19, please make sure you explain this in your Rationale Document. We will talk more about this in a few minutes when we discuss the coverage of the syllabus content and the assessment objectives.

- Students can complete the work within their portfolio at any time during their course of study.

You may want to include some pieces of work which have been set or completed after receiving these requirements. You can share the marks for mock exams or coursework with candidates – you do not need to keep these confidential.

In many cases the quality of a candidate's work improves during the course of study, so that later work is at a higher level. Where this is the case you may decide that later work is a better reflection of the candidate's level of achievement. However, during the unusual conditions of the Covid-19 pandemic, some candidates may have slipped back as a consequence of prolonged periods of school closure. In these circumstances you may wish to include earlier work in the candidate's portfolio, so that school-assessed grades reflect the quality of each candidate's best work.

### **Slide 15: Types of evidence**

There are various types of evidence that you can use to produce school-assessed grades for candidates. You can decide what will work best for your students. However, you will need three substantial pieces of evidence for each candidate in each syllabus. You can read some of our recommendations on this slide.

When it comes to using complete past papers from the syllabus, you can find many of these on the School Support Hub ([schoolsupporthub.cambridgeinternational.org](https://schoolsupporthub.cambridgeinternational.org)) together with mark schemes and example candidate responses. We have recently brought together some explanations of how you might use these at a subject-by-subject level. We are also putting the link in the chat so you can share it with teachers if you think it would help.

I want to draw your attention to a new piece of guidance for November 2021. We have said that you can use past papers as pieces of candidate evidence. It is acceptable to use a multiple-choice past question paper but you must follow these rules:

- Only one of the candidate's three pieces of evidence can be a multiple-choice question paper.
- You should only use multiple-choice questions to test candidates where this is part of the standard assessment model of the Cambridge International syllabus.
- For tasks set by the centre, multiple-choice questions should NOT be used.

We have made these changes because the candidate responses provided for a multiple-choice test do not provide clear evidence of a candidate's performance and so are difficult to review as part of our quality assurance processes.

### **Slide 16: Evidence – coverage**

The three substantial pieces of work in the portfolio must be within the content and the assessment objectives of the relevant syllabus.

For each candidate, this must cover as broad a range of the assessment objectives as possible. For example, in a syllabus where there is an assessment objective covering theoretical knowledge and understanding and a second assessment objective covering practical skills, at least one piece of work should be theoretical and at least one should be practical.

In circumstances where government Covid-19 regulations have prevented you from covering a particular assessment objective, it does not need to be covered in the portfolio. You should explain this in the Rationale Document.

Examples include circumstances in which schools were ordered to close, preventing access to the facilities needed for practical work, or circumstances in which social distancing regulations prevented group work. You do not need to apply for exemptions if you are using school-assessed grades.

The work in each portfolio must also cover as broad a range of the syllabus content as possible. For example, where syllabus content is organised into topics, the three pieces of work in a portfolio should be on different topics.

### **Slide 17: Security and authentication**

You must be able to confirm, with a reasonable degree of confidence, that the work included in every portfolio is authentic – which means that it is the candidate's own unaided work.

A 'reasonable degree of confidence' does not mean absolute certainty. However, it does mean that you have taken reasonable steps to make sure the work is authentic.

Ideally, all the work in the portfolio should have been done under the direct supervision of a teacher, at school. Under these conditions the teacher can be reasonably confident that candidates have not had inappropriate access to the internet or to open books, or help from families or friends while doing the work.

However, we understand that direct supervision by teachers may not be possible in all circumstances, including where schools have been closed for long periods, or for a private candidate. It is acceptable for some or all of the work in a portfolio to have been done at home.

However, the teacher should be confident that the work done at home is of a consistent standard with other work that the candidate has done. Where the work has been set specifically for assessment purposes, and the candidate knows this or could infer this, then some sort of supervision is required. This could be through a laptop camera or by an adult member of the family who can provide written confirmation that the work is the candidate's own, and that no help has been given.

You must describe the conditions the work was completed under in the Rationale Document.

As far as possible, you should treat private candidates in the same way as school candidates. The requirements for the amount of work, the types of work, the coverage of syllabus content and assessment objectives, are the same. The requirement for a reasonable degree of confidence in the authenticity of the work is also the same.

If the work of a private candidate has been done under the supervision of a reputable teaching institution, you should accept a statement from the institution on the authenticity of the work. You need to decide whether or not a teaching institution is reputable. If you are not familiar with the institution, you should not accept its statements.

Work completed earlier in the course of study by a private candidate should not be accepted unless there is convincing evidence of its authenticity. Assurances from the candidate, or statements made by family members long after the work has been completed, are not sufficiently strong evidence.

You may need to set work for private candidates to complete, ideally at your school under the direct supervision of a teacher.

The school that made the entry (the 'entering centre') is responsible for the entry, and therefore for the final school-assessed grade. They are responsible for submitting the school-assessed grade for the candidate on the Grade Submission System, and their Head of Centre will sign the declaration which accompanies the grades submitted. The entering centre must therefore be fully satisfied in how the final grade has been determined, in terms of both the evidence itself and its authenticity, and the marking and grading processes followed in order to generate a final grade.

### **Slide 18: Setting school-assessed grades**

### **Slide 19: Setting school-assessed grades**

The large guidance document that we published last week ([www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-collecting-evidence](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-collecting-evidence)) includes a recommended process for deciding school-assessed grades to help make sure your grades are fair and consistent.

You can read the five-step process on the slide. The guidance itself walks you through each step in depth. We recommend that you read it before you award any grades for work in the portfolio, or consider what overall grade would be most appropriate.

As mentioned earlier, the guidance document also includes case studies, showing different ways of balancing the evidence to arrive at a final grade.

### **Slide 20: Setting school-assessed grades – continued**

You can decide how best to balance the relative weight that you give to these pieces of evidence when coming to your decision about the final grade. However, you should be consistent in how you weight different pieces of evidence – if the same combination of pieces of evidence has been chosen for several candidates, the weighting you give to each piece of evidence should be the same for all candidates.

As you can see in this illustration, you should not allocate a candidate an overall grade which is higher or lower than any of the grades that you have allocated to the individual pieces of evidence. For example, if you have allocated grades B, C, C for the three pieces of evidence, it would not be appropriate to allocate either a Grade A (or higher) or a Grade D (or lower) for this student. In this example, you will need to make a judgement about whether a Grade B or a Grade C is the most appropriate grade, based on the student's portfolio of evidence.

### **Slide 21: Setting school-assessed grades – continued**

The published grade thresholds for an individual syllabus component do not always correspond to the grades that are available as a final syllabus grade. For example, for Cambridge IGCSEs graded A\* to G, we do not set or publish a Grade A\* threshold for individual question paper components. However, Grade A\* is available as a final syllabus grade.

When you are allocating grades for the individual pieces of evidence, you should think about the grade for the piece of evidence in line with the final syllabus grades. For example, you could allocate a Grade A\* for a piece of evidence if you felt that the standard of work produced by the candidate was at a higher level than the standard seen for candidates you have allocated a Grade A.

In the example on the top left, you can see that the teachers have judged that one piece of evidence is at a higher level than the candidates allocated a Grade A, and it is therefore allocated an A\* grade. This means, with evidence grades of A, A\* and B, A\*, A and B are all appropriate overall grades.

In the example on the bottom right, the pieces of evidence are grades in a range from A to E. This means that any grade within that range – but not above or below – would be considered appropriate overall grades for this portfolio of work.

### **Slide 22: Additional support for setting school-assessed grades**

We appreciate that this may seem a bit challenging if you are setting school-assessed grades for the first time. To help you, within the guidance, we have published the full list of grade sets available at each qualification. There are some worked examples which show how different pieces of evidence might be weighted in considering a final grade.

### **Slide 23: Talking to students about evidence**

We are aware that parents and students will be interested in the process of awarding school-assessed grades. In some situations they will understandably be interested in which pieces of evidence will be used to judge their achievement.

If you want to discuss the portfolio of evidence with students, that is fine. Please remember, though, that the portfolio must cover as much of the course and as many assessment objectives as possible. A student cannot be judged on a narrow set of content or skills that just happen to reflect their strengths – the judgement must represent the whole course.

You can tell students the mark that you have given for each piece of evidence. However, you should not tell students the grade that you have allocated to each piece of evidence as part of this process. If you are using work that has already been graded or provisionally graded, such as mock exams, you can still use this. However, if you have not yet told students a grade for a piece of work, please do not do so. You must not tell students the overall final grade that you have allocated. Students must not know the final grade before results are released in January.

#### **Slide 24: Q&A**

#### **Slide 25: The Rationale Document**

#### **Slide 26: The Rationale Document**

You can find the document on our website. You can start to complete this for each of your Cambridge International syllabuses where you are submitting grades to us. If you are only making entries for one Cambridge IGCSE, for example, then you will only need to complete one Rationale Document. If you are making entries for, say, five subjects, you will be producing five separate Rationale Documents. Use the same template as a starting point for each one.

You will find it easier to complete each Rationale Document as you are deciding students' grades. The Rationale Document helps to make sure you cover all the areas that should be considered. It will also be a valuable record of your processes and decision-making if you need to refer back to them.

#### **Slide 27: Finding the Rationale Document**

We have published the template for the Rationale Document [on our website](#) and, as this is an important document, we want to start by first showing you where to find it! The Rationale Document is available as templates in two formats – Word and PDF – as we know schools have different preferences when it comes to filling in documents. We should say that the Word document is a bit more user-friendly if you need to paste tables or pictures into the document. [www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-setting-grades](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-setting-grades)

#### **Slide 28: Example Rationale Documents**

Alongside the Rationale Document, we have produced a number of examples of completed Rationale Documents. You can find these just under the main templates on our website. We hope that these will help you understand what we need to know for each syllabus and how much detail is required. These examples cover a number of scenarios and we hope they will be helpful as you begin to determine your students' grades.

The example Rationale Documents do not cover every scenario that exists, so please do not worry if you were going to approach any aspect of the document in a different way based on our guidance.

### **Slide 29: When you need to send your Rationale Document**

We will ask to see your Rationale Document alongside portfolios of student evidence as part of our quality assurance process.

You do not need to send us any Rationale Documents unless we ask for them. However, when we ask for them you will have five days to send them to us. Therefore, we recommend saving them where your exams officer can find them easily.

### **Slide 30: Q&A**

#### **Slide 31: Support available**

Before we go, we wanted to draw your attention to the school-assessed grades frequently asked questions (FAQs) page on our website ([www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-faqs](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/november-2021-faqs)), for those of you who may not have found it yet. Here we have collated the questions that we are seeing most frequently and provided comprehensive answers. The guidance document should be your first reference point, but if you have a question that is not covered in the guidance, try the FAQs. If you are still unsure, our Customer Services team will be happy to help you.

We recommend you check the Covid-19 page on our website for the latest updates and announcements ([www.cambridgeinternational.org/covid](http://www.cambridgeinternational.org/covid)) and also the dedicated November 2021 pages of our website.

You can also find answers to a wide range of frequently asked questions about specific series and more general information on the 'Help' section of our website ([help.cambridgeinternational.org](http://help.cambridgeinternational.org)).

Finally, our Customer Services team are available 24 hours a day, 6 days a week. You can get in touch with them at [info@cambridgeinternational.org](mailto:info@cambridgeinternational.org)

#### **Slide 32: Close**

We will post a recording of this webinar on the Online Learning portal, together with the script we used today.

Finally, please remember, if you are an Associate Centre please contact your Cambridge Associate with any questions.

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