

Collecting evidence to support school-assessed grades

30 March 2021

On 19 February we announced that 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 student work. This outline explains our approach to school-assessed grades.

If you are in a country or region who has switched to a school assessment approach, you will need to produce a school-assessed grade for all of the qualifications that you have made entries for. You should use the guidance in this document for all of these qualifications.

[You can also view answers to Frequently Asked Questions here.](#)

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The basis for school-assessed grades

Each school-assessed grade will be based on the level of achievement demonstrated by the candidate in work that they have done.

The school-assessed grades in June 2021 are different to the predicted grades which were issued in the June 2020 series. The predicted grades issued in June 2020 were based on the centre's judgement of what the candidate would have achieved had the exams taken place – a judgement based on potential. In June 2021, the school-assessed grades will be based on actual achievement.

Schools must base their judgement of the candidate's achievement on **demonstrated achievement only**. They cannot speculate whether the student could have done better had there been no pandemic or no disruption to teaching and learning.

Quantity of evidence required

Centres following a school assessment approach in June 2021 should identify a portfolio of **three substantial pieces of work** for each candidate in each syllabus.

By substantial, we mean a piece of work that has taken the candidate at least one hour of concentrated work to complete OR **[New]** you may combine some shorter tasks in order to create a single substantial piece of work that has taken the student at least one hour of concentrated work to complete. This constitutes one of the three pieces of evidence.

This means the school-assessed grades will be based on a roughly similar amount of work as would be used to determine an examination grade.

No candidate should have more than, or fewer than, three pieces of work in their portfolio.

Types of evidence

The types of work to be included among the three pieces of work are at the centre's discretion. They can include one or more of any of the following:

- Complete past papers from the syllabus with a duration of an hour or more*;
- Completed coursework prepared according to syllabus requirements;
- Work made up of questions selected from various past papers;
- Papers used as mock exams;
- Extended project work set by the school during the course of study;
- Tasks set by the centre, such as essays, assignments, problems, practical tasks.

We strongly recommend that at least one of the pieces of work is a complete past paper dating back to before June 2020. Past papers from later than the June 2020 series may be used in addition, at the centre's discretion.

Students doing past papers, mock exams and work made up of questions from past papers should, as far as possible, be given the appropriate access arrangements (such as extra time or enlarged copies of the paper). It is not necessary for schools to apply to Cambridge International for these access arrangements. Please continue to keep records showing students' need for access arrangements.

Schools using school-assessed grades can use coursework as one of a student's three pieces of work. Each entire coursework component prepared according to syllabus requirements counts as a single piece of evidence. It does not matter how many tasks make up the coursework component, it can still only be one piece of work for the evidence portfolio. Where a syllabus has two coursework components the two completed pieces of coursework can count as two of the three pieces of work necessary for the portfolio. The coursework should not be submitted to Cambridge International for moderation. It should be retained at the school in case it is required for the external quality assurance process.

* If you want to use a complete past paper which is set by us but is less than an hour in duration, this is acceptable and can count as one of your pieces of evidence. However, if you are creating your own paper, or using another type of assignment to cover the component's assessment objectives, this must take at least one hour. For speaking tests, you can either use a past paper or one that you have created yourself. Both of these may be under an hour in duration.

Coverage of Syllabus content and Assessment Objectives

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 as possible of the assessment objectives. 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 schools from covering a particular assessment objective, then it does not need to be covered in the portfolio and that fact should be explained in the Rationale Document. Examples of this might 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. Centres do not need to apply to Cambridge International for exemptions if they are awarding school-assessed grades.

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

You do not need to use the same pieces of work for each student in the same syllabus. The types of work to be included among the three pieces of work are at your discretion and you can therefore use different pieces of work for each candidate's portfolio.

Timing of work

Students can complete the work within their portfolio at any time during their course of study. Schools may want to include some pieces of work which have been set or completed after receiving these requirements.

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

Security and authentication

The centre 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 the centre has taken reasonable steps to ensure that the work is authentic.

Ideally, all of 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 students have not had inappropriate access to the internet, to open books, or to the assistance of 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 prolonged periods, or where the candidate is 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 student has done. Where the work has been set specifically for assessment purposes, and the student knows this or could infer this, then some sort of supervision is required, whether it is through the camera of a laptop or by an adult member of the family who can provide written confirmation that the work is the candidate's own and that no assistance has been given.

The conditions under which the work has been completed should be set out in the Rationale Document.

[New] Selecting the three pieces of evidence

It is the responsibility of the subject teacher(s) to choose the most appropriate three pieces of evidence that will be used to work out a student's final grade, in line with our guidance in the 'Collecting Evidence' document about broad coverage of syllabus content and assessment objectives. However, you should make sure that each candidate knows which three pieces of evidence will be used, and appropriately consider any feedback from the candidate about this choice.

Private candidates

As far as possible, centres should treat private candidates who are entered through the centre 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, then a statement from that institution should be accepted as providing the necessary confidence in the authenticity of the work. It is for the centre to decide whether or not a teaching institution is reputable. If the centre is not familiar with the institution, then the centre 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.

It may therefore be necessary for schools to set work for private candidates to complete, ideally at the school under the direct supervision of its teachers.

Cambridge International AS & A Level candidates

Our AS and A Level syllabuses are divided into two parts to allow a staged approach to assessment. Each part has its own distinct syllabus content and its own exam components. The two parts are:

- the AS Level part, which comprises the AS Level and also forms a part of the A Level;

- the 'A Level only' part, which is taken only by A Level candidates. This also known as the 'A2' part or 'A2 components'.

For A Level candidates, the pieces of work used to decide the teacher assessed grades will depend on whether the candidate has taken their AS Level in a previous series, and on the entry route that the candidate is taking in June 2021.

- If your candidates are taking the staged route carry forward option and already have their AS Level result from a previous series, all three pieces of evidence in the portfolio must be A2 evidence. These candidates only ever planned to take their A2 components in the June 2021 series. In due course, we will provide more information about how to combine your three pieces of evidence to create an A Level grade and how this relates to the AS Level result your candidates already have.
- If your candidates already have their AS Level result from a previous series but were planning to retake the AS Level components in June 2021 as well as taking the A2 components, one of the pieces of evidence can be for AS Level. The other two pieces must be A2 evidence, and if you plan to include only one past paper as part of the three pieces of evidence, the past paper must be for an A2 component.
- If your candidates are taking the linear route, where they are entered for all the AS Level and A2 components together and for the first time in June 2021, one of the pieces of evidence can be for AS Level. The other two pieces must be A2 evidence, and if you plan to include only one past paper as part of the three pieces of evidence, the past paper must be for an A2 component.

Cambridge Pre-U candidates

You should select three pieces of evidence for Cambridge Pre-U syllabuses in line with the requirements of this document. There are no specific additional requirements for Cambridge Pre-U.

Marking

You must mark any past papers and questions taken from past papers using the mark schemes produced by Cambridge International. These are available from the [School Support Hub](#).

You should mark coursework using Cambridge International's marking criteria, which are available in the syllabus document or on the [School Support Hub](#). If you do not have access, [contact your School Support Hub Coordinator at your school](#).

Where tasks have been set by the centre and have been taken by more than one candidate, the centre must write a mark scheme for the tasks and use it to mark each candidate's work.

[New] Special consideration

Special consideration requests will not apply in the usual way this summer because students will not be taking their exams. You should bear in mind that loss of teaching time is not an acceptable reason for special consideration. However, where illness or other adverse personal circumstances which are outside the candidate's control might have temporarily affected performance in a particular piece of evidence, for example in mock exams, you should bear that in mind when making your judgements. In the first instance, if you are able to you should replace the affected piece of evidence with another piece of evidence.

Internal quality assurance by the centre

Where more than one teacher in a centre is using the same mark scheme, the teachers must standardise their marking at the beginning of the marking process, so that they all apply the

mark scheme in the same way. Details of how teachers standardised their marking should be recorded in the Rationale Document.

In cases where work was completed earlier in the course and has already been marked, it is possible that more than one teacher applied the same mark scheme but the teachers did not standardise their marking. This is acceptable and the work can still be included in portfolios. However, the fact that the marking has not been standardised should be recorded in the Rationale Document.

Where more than one teacher in a centre has applied the same mark scheme, the involved teachers should sample each other's marking afterwards to check for consistency. Where teachers find inconsistent marking approaches, candidates' marks should be adjusted as necessary.

How to determine school-assessed grades

We will explain how the pieces of work in a candidate's portfolio should be used in the determination of a school-assessed grade in March.

Managing bias

It is important that the marking of work in the portfolios is objective; when marking, teachers should only take account of the student's knowledge, skills and abilities which are evident in the piece of work. We encourage schools to be aware of conscious and unconscious bias in determining school-assessed grades and will provide more information on avoiding bias in March.

The Rationale Document

Each centre should complete a Rationale Document for each syllabus, explaining in detail how the school-assessed grades have been determined. This document will include:

- the rationale used to select pieces of work for each candidate;
- whether any assessment objectives are not included in the portfolios, and the reason why they were omitted¹;
- the conditions in which the work was completed and how it has been authenticated;
- how the work of private candidates has been obtained, selected and authenticated;
- how marking was standardised and reviewed, in cases where more than one teacher has applied the same mark scheme.
- how teachers ensured objectivity in marking and how any access arrangements were met

The Rationale Document will also need to include details of how the work in the portfolio was used to decide the school-assessed grades. We will tell you how to do this in March.

External quality assurance by Cambridge International

Cambridge International will carry out external quality assurance checks on school-assessed grades. We will contact some or all centres who have provided school-assessed grades for a syllabus, and we will tell these centres which candidates' work we would like to see. The centre will be required to send us the work in the portfolios for these candidates, together with the Rationale Document.

¹ Loss of teaching time is not in itself sufficient reason for excluding an assessment objective, since most schools have been able to teach remotely during periods of school closure. However, Covid restrictions preventing access to facilities or equipment, or preventing group work, may be sufficient.



Centres should therefore ensure that they have candidates' portfolios of work available in case they are needed for the external quality assurance process.

The sample of schools selected for quality assurance checks will include:

- large- or medium-entry schools in which there is a significant discrepancy between the pattern of grades proposed for June 2021 and those achieved in June 2019;
- a random selection of smaller-entry schools; and
- schools in which there have been cases of suspected malpractice in the past.

If we find any issues during the quality assurance process, we will contact the centre, and we may ask them to make changes to their process and to reconsider their judgements. We will withhold students' grades until the issues have been resolved to the satisfaction of both the centre and Cambridge International.