

Consultation Response from the Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

• Consultation on how GCSE, AS and A level grades should be awarded in summer 2021

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) welcomes the opportunity to respond to this consultation and the following is made as a public response.

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG):

The Royal Geographical Society (with IBG) is the UK's learned society and professional body for geography and geographers. The Society maintains a strong overview of the discipline, its standing and practice in schools, higher education, and the workplace. This includes the accreditation of geographers and geography programmes through the award of Chartered Geographer to individuals and the Society's accreditation of undergraduate and Masters level geography programmes.

We advise on, and support the advancement of, geography; the dissemination of geographical knowledge to the public, policy makers and other specialist audiences including teachers, Geography ITT Scholars, and those involved in expeditions and fieldwork; and training and professional development for practising geographers. We work closely with the Department for Education, Ofqual, Ofsted, the awarding organisations, and geography teachers to support good practice in teaching and learning in geographical education.

We have 16,000 Fellows and members and our work currently reaches more than three million people per year. The Society awards the professional accreditation Chartered Geographer, which is awarded to teachers through the Chartered Geographer (Teacher) designation and accredits geography undergraduate programmes. Each year the Society works in a range of ways with teachers and pupils from about half of all English secondary schools which includes work with academies and their respective MATs, free, independent and maintained schools.

The Society provides a significant programme of activities to support teachers during their training year and entry into the profession. We work regularly with Schools Direct, Teach First and HEI ITT providers to provide subject specialist input into their secondary programmes and since 2016 the Society has awarded Geography ITT Scholarships to over 500 geographers. Our annual programme of CPD reaches about 1,500+ teachers and the Society's online resources available via www.rgs.org/schools receive over 1.3 million views annually.

Steve Brace

Head of Education and Outdoor Learning

Royal Geographical Society (with IBG)

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Questions:

1. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the grades awarded to students in 2021 should reflect the standard at which they are performing?

Strongly Agree

2. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the alternative approach to awarding grades in summer 2021 should seek to encourage students to continue to engage with their education for the remainder of the academic year?

Strongly Agree

3. When would you prefer that teachers make their final assessment of their students' performance?

May/June for the final assessment to be made.

4. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should be able to use evidence of the standard of a student's performance from throughout their course?

Strongly agree

5. Should there be any limit on the period from which previous work could be drawn?

Yes

6. If you answered 'yes', what should that limit be?

18 month period

7. Do you have any comments on when students should be assessed?

No

8. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should provide a set of papers to support teachers in assessing their students' work?

Agree

9. Do you think the use of the papers provided by the exam boards should be compulsory or optional, for GCSEs, AS and A levels?

Optional

10. To what extent do you agree or disagree that any papers provided by the exam boards should include questions that are of a type that is familiar to students?

Strongly agree

11. To what extent do you agree or disagree that if teachers use exam board papers they should have choice about the topics covered in the questions their students answer, for example through choice of which papers they use with their students from the set of papers provided?

Strongly agree



12. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should be required to assess (either by use of the exam board papers or via other evidence) a certain minimum proportion of the overall subject content, for each subject?

Agree

13. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should mark any papers their students are asked to complete?

Neither agree nor disagree

14. Do you have any comments on the use of exam board papers?

Optional:

The papers should not be compulsory. If made compulsory the papers would create a new 2021 examination series.

Maintenance of existing approach:

The release of the pre-prepared 2021 summer papers would provide teachers and their students with questions and assessment approaches that are familiar and understood. No new styles of questions or approaches to assessment should be introduced into the examination board papers, this should be left to the existing and well understood cycle of specification review and reform.

Content, flexibility, and modularity:

The Society would welcome the exam board papers (and mark schemes) be provided in a form which is modular, flexible and that would allow teacher to use them in a variety of forms within or alongside their existing ongoing assessments. This would allow teachers to focus these additional assessment opportunities on content that they know their students had studied and make other appropriate accommodations.

For the current examination cycles for geography GCSE and A Level there has been no reduction in content. Hence, the Society believes that there can be no practical refocusing of the geography examinations on context that all or most students will have covered. There will have been significant and substantial variation of coverage between students given

- the regional application of Covid Tiers
- differences in access to technology
- whether students had the opportunity to undertake geographical fieldwork before lockdown
- individual school's policies towards remote learning
- the capacities of students (and their home environments) to maintain their learning

Requiring that the exam board papers be taken 'in full' and at one sitting will inevitably create an exam season and place significant additional demands on schools, teachers and students.

The Society does not feel in current circumstances it is appropriate to place the responsibility on students to negotiate which sections of an unseen 'final' exam they should choose based on their individual understanding of which content they had – or had not – studied.

The Society recognises that geography students' experience of geographical fieldwork (a normal requirement of the taught GCSE and A Level courses and their assessment) has been constrained or cancelled as a result of Covid restrictions.

Timing:

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The Society would support the early provision of exam board papers to schools, rather than the creation of an exam season in the summer term. This would allow teachers to undertake ongoing assessments which incorporate materials from the exam board papers and mark pupils' work accordingly.

We recognise that this presents the potential for questions to be shared more widely. However, the Society feels that trusting teachers to incorporate such external support as appropriate over the spring and summer term mitigates against the significant challenges of creating a new exam season.

15. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should take account of a student's performance in any non-exam assessment where that has been completed in full for a subject?

Strongly agree

16. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should take account of a student's performance in any non-exam assessment where that has been completed in part for a subject?

Strongly agree

17. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should mark their students' non-exam assessments?

Strongly agreed

(And where completed the geography NEA will have likely already been marked.)

18. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the marking of non-exam assessments should not be moderated by the exam boards this year?

Neither agree nor disagree

19. Do you have any comments on the use of non-exam assessment and separately reported results and grades?

Non-Exam Assessed course work:

The Society accepts the significant challenges presented to geography A Level students and the requirement to undertake an Independent Investigation. It is currently difficult to establish a robust understanding as to how many geography students have completed a full NEA. Where appropriate, practical and can be safely undertaken all reasonable opportunities should be offered to geography students to complete their NEA.

Where available, geography teachers should draw on their students' NEAs within their assessments.

Under normal circumstances the geography NEA is worth 20% of a student's final marks. The Society recommends that geography teachers give 'broadly comparable' consideration to the weighting of a student's A Level geography NEA within the overall range of evidence they use to undertake their assessment.

20. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a breadth of evidence should inform teachers' judgements?

Strongly agree



21. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the provision of training and guidance from exam boards should support teachers to reach their assessment of a student's deserved grade?

Strongly agree

22. To what extent do you agree or disagree that teachers should be able to take into account other performance evidence for a student before submitting a grade?

Agree

23. To what extent do you agree or disagree that performance evidence from closer to the time of the final assessment, should carry more weight in determining a student's final grade?

Neither agree nor disagree

24. Do you have any comments on the use of other performance evidence?

No additional comments

25. To what extent do you agree or disagree that all students should be assessed within a given time period for each subject – whether or not their school or college must or is using exam board papers?

Agree

26. To what extent do you agree or disagree that exam boards should publish all of their papers shortly before the assessments in order to manage the risk of some students being advantaged through papers being leaked?

Disagree

27. Do you have any comments about the assessment period for the use of exam board papers or teacher devised assessments

The Society would recommend that exam board papers being provided at the earliest opportunity and it is the Society view that the existing, pre-prepared summer 2021 papers could be modularised and then released promptly to schools. This would allow teachers to incorporate relevant sections, questions or modules into their ongoing assessment planning.

The Society would not welcome a 'release date' at end of the summer term which inevitably creates a new exam season.

If the papers are released early and openly teachers can the incorporate into ongoing assessment and use as the basis of their assessments undertaken over the spring and summer terms.

Such a move would further support the trust placed in teachers' judgements, complemented by appropriate support from the Exam Boards, across the full range of their students' work.

28. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the assessments should, if possible, be taken within the student's school or college?

Neither agree nor disagree

29. To what extent do you agree or disagree that if the pandemic makes it necessary a student should be able to take their assessments at an alternative venue, including at home?



Agree

30. Do you have any comments on the conditions under which students should be assessed?

No additional comments

31. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should provide support and information to schools and colleges to help them meet the assessment requirements?

Agree

32. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should set requirements for school and college internal quality assurance arrangements and should provide guidance on these requirements to support centres?

Agree

33. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the head of a school or college should make a declaration to the exam board confirming its requirements had been followed and teachers had regard to the guidance and support materials provided?

Agree

34. Do you have any comments about internal quality assurance?

No

35. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should quality assure how schools and colleges are determining grades?

Agree

36. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should quality assure the overall approach for all schools and colleges?

Agree

37. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should sample, at subject level, the evidence on which the submitted grades were based?

Strongly Agree

38. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should target their more in-depth quality assurance activities?

Neither agree nor disagree

39. To what extent do you agree or disagree that exam boards could only change a student's grade after a review of the evidence and discussion with the school or college?

Neither agree nor disagree

40. Do you have any comments about external quality assurance?

No



41. To what extent do you agree or disagree that students should not be told the grade their teacher has submitted before results day?

Neither agree nor disagree

42. To what extent do you agree or disagree that students should be able to appeal their grade on the grounds that their teacher made an error when assessing the student's performance?

Neither agree nor disagree

43. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the school or college should consider the appeal?

Neither agree nor disagree

44. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the appeal should normally be considered by a competent person within the student's school or college who was not involved with the original assessment?

Neither agree nor disagree

45. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a school or college should be able to appoint a competent person from outside of the school or college to consider the appeal?

Neither agree nor disagree

46. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a grade should only be changed if it is found not to represent a legitimate exercise of academic judgement?

Neither agree nor disagree

47. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a student should be able to appeal to the exam board on the grounds that the school or college did not follow the exam board's requirements when it assessed the student's performance?

Neither agree nor disagree

48. To what extent do you agree or disagree that a student should be able to appeal to the exam board on the grounds that the school or college did not properly consider the student's appeal?

Neither agree nor disagree

49. To what extent do you agree or disagree that we should seek to bring forward results day(s), in order for appeals to begin earlier?

Neither agree nor disagree

51. To what extent do you agree or disagree that the exam boards should provide information for schools and colleges on how they should handle appeals?

Neither agree nor disagree

52. Do you have any comments on the proposed appeal arrangements?

No



53. To what extent do you agree or disagree that private candidates should be able to complete the papers set by exam boards, with them marked by the exam boards?

Neither agree nor disagree

54. To what extent do you agree or disagree that private candidates should be able to work with a school or college to produce the same type of evidence as the school or college's other students?

Neither agree nor disagree

55. To what extent do you agree or disagree that exam boards should run normal exams for private candidates in summer 2021?

Neither agree nor disagree

56. To what extent do you agree or disagree that exam boards should run normal exams for private candidates in autumn 2021?

Neither agree nor disagree

57. Do you have any comments on the options for how grades should be made available to private candidates?

No

59. Should the exam boards be prohibited from offering GCSE, AS and A level exams in any country in 2021?

No answer given