

What to do if you have concerns or questions about your grades: student guide to appeals and malpractice or maladministration complaints

The information below applies to students receiving results for GCSE, AS and A levels, Extended Project Qualifications (EPQ) and Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) in maths regulated by Ofqual.

Exams and assessments were cancelled this year due to coronavirus (COVID-19) but most students will still receive their grades in time to move on to further study or employment. You may still be able to do this even if your grade isn't what you wanted.

Take a look at our [student guide](#) to find out more about how qualifications are being graded this year, autumn exams and the arrangements for appeals. You may also find it helpful to watch our [video](#) for further information on how your qualification has been graded. You will see from this information that your teachers have worked hard to agree your centre assessment grade(s) – their professional judgement of the grade(s) you would likely have received had your exams taken place – and your position in the rank order. We asked schools and colleges to use a range of evidence when making these judgements. Where a disabled student would have had a reasonable adjustment for their exams, centres were asked to take account of the student's likely achievement with this adjustment in place. Schools and colleges are required to comply with equality legislation, another safeguard in the process used this year. These judgements formed the basis of the centre assessment grade(s) and rank order information that your school or college submitted to the exam board for each of your subjects. To make sure standards are aligned across schools and colleges, all grades were standardised by exam boards, using a model developed by Ofqual.

If you have concerns about how your grade(s) was/were calculated, this information should help you understand whether you might have a reason to make a complaint about malpractice or maladministration (wrongdoing), including if you have concerns about bias or discrimination. There are also people who can help you with this. You can talk to your school or college, and there are helplines you can call for more information. You can find the details of these at the end of this guide.



Can I make an appeal?

Even if your results aren't what you were hoping for, you might still be able to move on as you had planned. If you have concerns about how your grade(s) was/were calculated you should talk to your school or college about your options. It is important to remember that:

- you cannot challenge your school or college under the appeals process on the centre assessment grade(s) it submitted or your rank order position(s). Any appeal would have to be undertaken by someone better placed than your teachers to judge your likely grade if exams had taken place – in the unique circumstances of this summer, we do not believe there is such a person. Also, because of the role of the rank order in grading this year, such an appeal would affect other students in your cohort: if one student successfully appealed against their position in the rank order, it would have negative implications for other students who would, in turn, need to be given an opportunity to appeal;
- you can ask your school or college to check whether it made a mistake when submitting your centre assessment grade(s) or your position in the rank order(s). If it finds it made a mistake in the data it provided it can ask the exam board to correct it;
- your school or college can appeal to the exam board on your behalf if it believes the exam board used the wrong data when it calculated your grade(s), or made a mistake when it communicated your grade(s).
- your school or college can appeal if it believes the historical data used for standardisation was not a reliable basis for predicting its 2020 results. This might include situations where:
 - there's been a substantial change in the demographic make-up of the centre, for example if a single-sex school has changed to co-educational, or
 - where a school or college experienced a monumental event one year (such as flooding or fire which meant students had to re-locate) which affected one year's results in the historical data used in the model, or
 - where a school or college has evidence that results this year were likely to show a very different pattern of grades to results in previous years.

It is important that you speak to your school or college about whether it believes there are grounds for appeal in your case – all appeals must be made by the school or college and not by individual students.



If your school or college won't submit an appeal on your behalf it must have a process in place for you to ask for a review of that decision, so that someone else at your centre considers your request. You should first raise this with your school or college. If you wish to complain that your school or college does not have an appropriate process in place for you to do this, you should follow your school or college's complaints process in the first instance. If your complaint is not resolved, you can speak to the exam board for further guidance.

Where you believe there may have been an error in your centre assessment grade(s), your school or college should be able to explain how it made its judgement, and what evidence it relied on. Even where there is no evidence of an error being made, understanding how your centre made a judgement and what evidence it took into account, might help you to understand the grade you have been given.

It is important to remember that the centre assessment grade and rank order information submitted by your school or college is just one part of the process of calculating your final grade. The centre assessment grades schools and colleges have submitted have been statistically standardised to make sure the same standard is applied to the millions of grades schools and colleges up and down the country submitted for their students. You can find more information on the overall process on our [website](#).

Accessing your centre assessment grade and / or rank order

Your school or college is not allowed to tell you your centre assessment grade(s) and position in the rank order(s) before results day. After results day, you can ask your school or college for this information if you want to. Each school and college will decide how and when students may receive centre assessment grade(s) so you should look for information from your school or college or discuss this with them directly. You can find more details about your right to access that information on the [Information Commissioner's Office website](#).



Making a complaint about bias, discrimination or malpractice / maladministration

You are not able to appeal your calculated grade(s) because you disagree with your centre assessment grade(s) and rank order(s). However, you might be concerned that your centre assessment grade(s), or your rank order position(s), was/were wrong because you believe the judgement was influenced by factors other than evidence about your academic performance. We know that some students, and groups representing students, were concerned that some centre assessment grades and rank order positions could be influenced by bias or discrimination. The national results do not indicate bias on the part of schools and colleges; early analysis suggests there will generally be no widening of gaps between results of different groups of students. This does not mean that there will be no individual cases of bias or discrimination. Such cases would be taken very seriously and we expect them to be rare.

If bias or discrimination affected your centre assessment grade(s) or rank order position(s) this summer, this could be a form of malpractice or maladministration. If you think malpractice or maladministration might have affected you then in the first instance you should discuss this directly with your school or college, and raise a complaint through its complaints policy. If you feel that your concerns have not been addressed, you could then consider raising your concerns about malpractice or maladministration with the exam board which issued your results. It is important to remember that this would not be an appeal, but rather an allegation that malpractice or maladministration occurred in relation to your centre assessment grade(s) or rank order position(s). Such allegations would be serious, and taken seriously. As you would be making a malpractice/maladministration allegation you would not be subject to the same deadlines as those set for appeals.

Whilst you would be expected to raise any concerns with your school or college initially, if you have evidence of malpractice or maladministration on the part of your school or college and have concerns about raising it with them directly in the first instance, it may be appropriate for you to discuss this directly with the exam board instead; see contact details below.

Explaining what makes you think malpractice or maladministration took place

Receiving a grade lower than you hoped for or expected is not itself an indication of bias or discrimination. Telling an exam board that your centre assessment grade was lower than you think you deserved will not be enough to make the exam board suspect malpractice or maladministration took place.



For your case to be considered, you will need to show something specific or something surprising, which calls for an explanation that your school or college has been unable to give. The following examples may help you think about what this might look like. These examples are not a complete list - circumstances will vary, and again the key consideration is the evidence that may exist in support of any allegation.

Example 1

Student W is given centre assessment grades of B, C and D for 3 A level subjects. Student W's academic record shows in each subject they have variously attained grades B, C and D in assessments throughout the course.

Student W asked their college to explain the centre assessment grade D. The tutor for that subject demonstrated that the centre assessment grade was correctly submitted to the exam board. They explained that they considered student W had found the subject for which they received a grade D harder to access as the course progressed and, although they had secured a grade C in the mock exam, this was borderline and was followed by clear D grades in homework assignments following the mock.

An exam board is unlikely to think the grade D is out of line with student W's academic record and is likely to think the explanation given by the tutor is consistent with making a fair judgement of how student W might have performed. It is unlikely the exam board would suspect that malpractice or maladministration might have taken place.

Example 2

Student X's academic record, including progress reviews and grades achieved in assessments such as mock exams and class tests, shows sustained performance at a grade 5 - 7 standard in class assessments for GCSE maths, physics and chemistry. For physics and chemistry student X's centre assessment grades were grade 6, and for maths a grade 3.

Student X asked their school to explain the centre assessment grade and rank order position for maths. The exams officer confirmed that no mistake had been made and added that there was no possibility of a discussion about the grade and that no more information would be provided.

An exam board is likely to consider that the big difference between the centre assessment grade and student X's academic record is surprising, all the more so given the centre assessment grades matched the academic record for other related subjects.

The exam board might think the apparently low centre assessment grade for maths should be explained, and might be concerned by the school's refusal to provide any further information.

Looking at all of these concerns together we anticipate the exam board would have grounds to suspect that the centre assessment grade for maths might not be based on an objective judgement of how student X would have performed had exams taken place and that it would investigate the possibility that malpractice or maladministration had taken place.



Example 3

Student Y is given a centre assessment grade of D for A level English. Student Y's academic record shows 3 grade B, 4 grade C, and 3 grade D in assessments through the course.

Student Y's school has confirmed that it submitted the correct centre assessment grade for student Y. The English teacher did not have time to speak to student Y, but confirmed the grade D was 'my objective judgement and fair in the circumstances'.

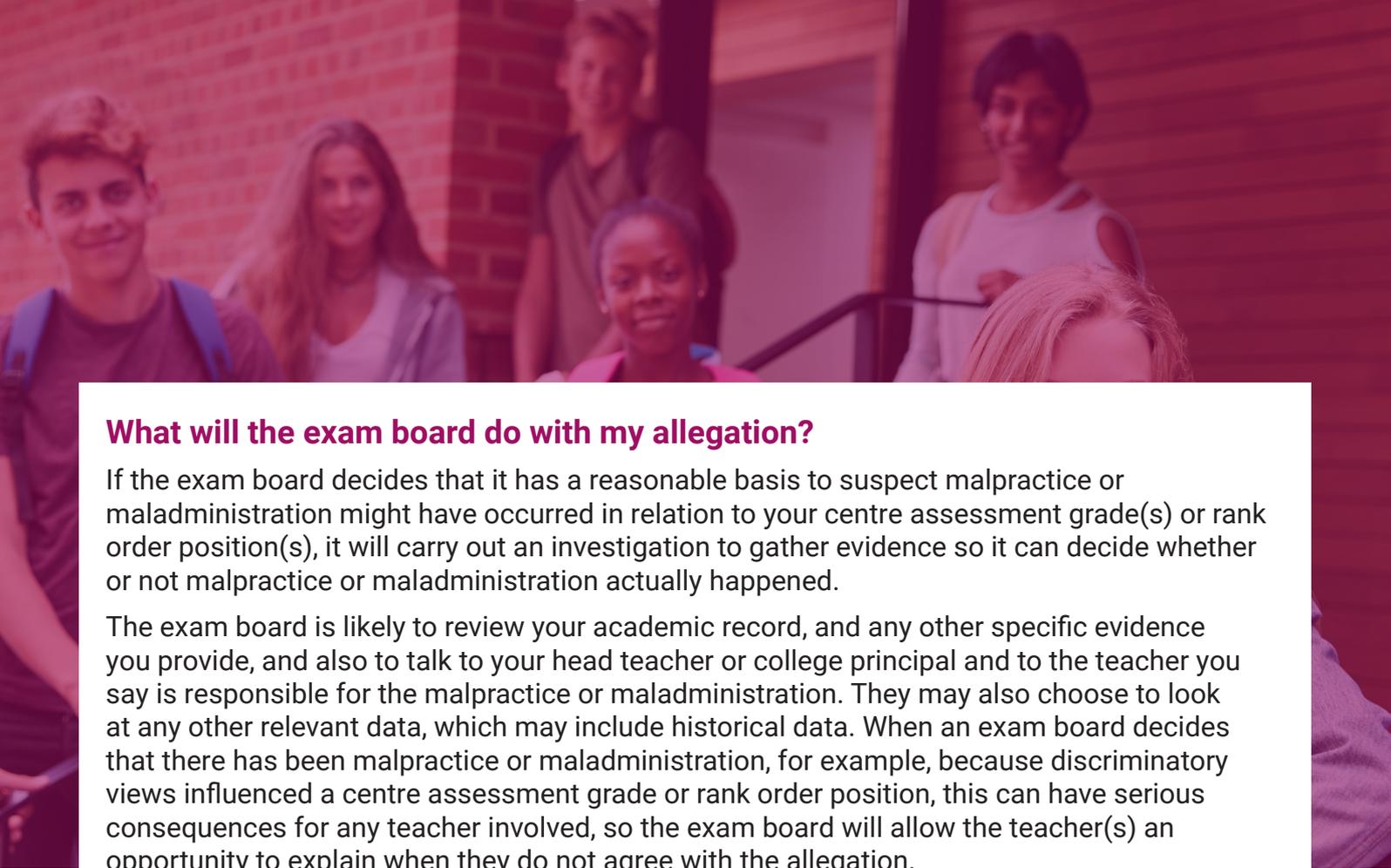
As well as their academic record, student Y is able to produce a series of emails with the school in which they complain that the English teacher dislikes them and marks their work more harshly than other students. There is an email from another English teacher, from a different school, which says they have seen some of student Y's work, marked at grades D and C, which they would have given a grade B. There is a message from the head teacher which notes that student Y does not have an easy relationship with their English teacher.

The exam board might consider that the centre assessment grade, grade D, is not sufficiently out of line with the academic record to cause a suspicion of malpractice. However, the email correspondence means the exam board might decide to request further information and explanation from the school before deciding whether there were sufficient grounds to suspect malpractice or maladministration might have taken place.

Example 4

Student Z is given a centre assessment grade 3 for GCSE history, they had hoped for a grade 4. Student Z is from a BAME (Black, Asian and minority ethnic) background. They learn through social media that a number of other students in their class, also from BAME backgrounds, received lower than expected centre assessment grades. It becomes clear that, in that class, most BAME students were given centre assessment grades which were lower than they anticipated. This does not reflect the students' understanding of how they performed in class relative to other students.

The exam board might review the rank order information from the school as a first step. If the composition of the rank order for GCSE history shows BAME students are mostly in the lower end of the rank order, and this is not the case for other subjects, the exam board might consider the rank order for history requires further explanation. If the school cannot provide a good reason, the exam board is likely to decide it has grounds to suspect malpractice or maladministration might have affected the rank order which it will investigate.



What will the exam board do with my allegation?

If the exam board decides that it has a reasonable basis to suspect malpractice or maladministration might have occurred in relation to your centre assessment grade(s) or rank order position(s), it will carry out an investigation to gather evidence so it can decide whether or not malpractice or maladministration actually happened.

The exam board is likely to review your academic record, and any other specific evidence you provide, and also to talk to your head teacher or college principal and to the teacher you say is responsible for the malpractice or maladministration. They may also choose to look at any other relevant data, which may include historical data. When an exam board decides that there has been malpractice or maladministration, for example, because discriminatory views influenced a centre assessment grade or rank order position, this can have serious consequences for any teacher involved, so the exam board will allow the teacher(s) an opportunity to explain when they do not agree with the allegation.

If the exam board thinks there has been malpractice or maladministration, the exam board will then consider whether the results it issued to you which took that information into account were wrong and, if so, whether it should change those results.



Help and support

You can contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) for advice on discrimination claims. EASS advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights. You can contact EASS on **0808 800 0082**, by textphone on **0808 800 0084** or at www.equalityadvisoryservice.com.

OPENING HOURS:

Monday - Friday: 9am - 7pm

Saturday: 10am - 2pm

Contact the **Exam Results Helpline from the National Careers Service** to speak to a professionally qualified careers adviser for advice on next steps.

0800 100 900 nationalcareers.service.gov.uk

Lines open from 8am to 10pm, 7 days a week. Calls are free from landlines and most mobiles.

Contact the **Ofqual** student support phone line if you want to find out more about how you were graded, the autumn exams series, how to make an appeal or how to raise a concern about bias or discrimination.

0300 303 3344 gov.uk/ofqual

Lines open from 9am to 5pm weekdays, with extended hours and weekends during results weeks. See website for information. Calls charged at your standard network rate.

Contact the **exam board** to progress a complaint if you think you have evidence of malpractice

AQA **0800 197 7162** www.aqa.org.uk

OCR **01223 553 998** www.ocr.org.uk

Pearson **0345 618 0440** www.pearson.com

WJEC Eduqas **029 2105 5443** www.wjec.co.uk

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