

# Lord Lawson of Beamish Academy

## GCSE and A Level grades 2020

### Introduction

The Secretary of State for Education and Ofqual announced on Monday 17 August that students will receive GCSE and A level grades based on their Centre Assessment Grades (CAG). We welcome the news of this change of policy, following a week of terrible uncertainty and pressure for students, their parents and teachers. At the time of writing, vocational and technical grades are not affected by this announcement.

36% of our students' A level grades had been marked down by the statistical model used by the examination boards. We are pleased that students will now receive the grades that we as a school originally put forward for them. 2% of our students' Centre Assessment Grades had been moderated up, and students will retain this higher grade: no-one will receive a grade that is lower than the grade they have already been given.

Not every student will be happy with their Centre Assessment Grade, however. A small number of students had not been working before lockdown at the level that might have been expected of them. Their Centre Assessment Grade will inevitably reflect this lower level.

***This document sets out what Centre Assessment Grades are, what they mean for our students, and what students can do if they believe that their Centre Assessment Grade is incorrect or unfair.***

### What are Centre Assessment Grades and how were they created?

It is important to use the right term – Centre Assessment Grades. These are not 'predicted grades', and nor are they simply 'teacher assessments'.

*"For this summer's awards, schools and colleges are being asked to provide centre assessment grades for their students. These should be fair, objective and carefully considered judgements of the grades schools and colleges believe their students would have been most likely to achieve if they had sat their exams, and should take into account the full range of available evidence."*

Ofqual, April 2020

The Centre Assessment Grade is the grade produced by the school and submitted to the examination board. The school (the 'examination centre') was required to submit the grade that, in our judgement, the student was most likely to achieve, based on work done up to 20 March 2020. Criteria for Centre Assessment Grades were strict. They could include:

- Mock examinations, where appropriate, completed and marked before 20 March 2020
- Any non-examined assessments (coursework), completed and assessed before 20 March 2020
- Other assessed work, completed by students and marked before 20 March 2020

It is important to remember that mock examinations vary from subject to subject; they often cover only a portion of the course, and they may be marked against different criteria and grade boundaries. On their own, they are therefore not a definite indicator of a final grade.

Centre Assessment Grades could not include:

- Teachers' estimations of students' potential, where this was not backed up by evidence
- Corrections made by students to their mock papers or other assessed pieces of work
- Work that was not formally submitted or assessed
- Work completed and submitted after 20 March 2020

At Lord Lawson, we believe that the Centre Assessment Grades we submitted were indeed “fair, objective and carefully considered.” Our process was extremely rigorous. It took from the middle of April until 15 June. It involved the following steps. (Please see the detailed information at the end of this document if you want to know more.)

- **Assessment evidence was collected** by teachers. This included mock exam marks, coursework marks and other marks.
- This work was **standardised** by subject leaders, to make sure that marks were awarded fairly and consistently
- Students were **ranked in order** by teachers and subject leaders, ranking highest to lowest
- This **rank order was moderated** by teachers and subject leaders. All students were discussed
- **Grades were applied** to all students, based on work completed and the standards achieved by similar students in previous years. Standardisation took place once more
- This system was then **quality-assured** by senior leaders. This was a thorough process, involving examination of the evidence used for ranking and grading
- Grades were **entered onto the school’s computer system** by subject leaders. They were **checked** and cross-checked by the Examination Officer before submission to the examination boards. All entries were **signed off** by Mr Fowler, as Head of Centre

### What if a student, following a disappointing mock grade, had decided to revise and study hard for the examinations, but then these were cancelled?

A few students will unfortunately find themselves in the situation where they had only just started to improve their work or their effort at the point that lockdown happened on 20 March. Some students did not complete work to their full potential in the months before this. Some students may not have revised hard for their mock exams, perhaps thinking at that stage that they ‘didn’t count’. It was heart-breaking to see some of these students telling their teachers, as they left school on 20 March, how upset they were that they would not be able to ‘prove’ themselves now by working hard for the exams.

Possibly these students would have been able to improve their work before the exams, but they did not have this opportunity, owing to coronavirus and the cancellation of exams. Centre Assessment Grades had to be based on the work that had been done before 20 March. We were not allowed to include work completed during lockdown, or estimates of potential.

For these students, there are still options available. Although their Centre Assessment Grades may be lower than they had hoped, there will be some courses available at 16+ and 18+. Our staff are ready to help with advice and guidance. Advice is also available from colleges and sixth form centres.

For most students, whatever their results, it will be in their interests immediately to ‘look forward’ towards the next step in their lives. For students considering post-16 options, the vast majority will find that the next step they wish to take is open to them. For students about to start university, anyone disappointed last week may yet find – following the Government’s announcement – that their first choice university may still be able to offer them a place, or that good opportunities open up at other institutions. In either case, students can contact the university, and our staff are available to offer guidance and support.

**Some students will wish to consider sitting their examinations in the autumn, to improve their grades.**

### What if a student is not happy with their Centre Assessment Grade?

Receiving a grade lower than you hoped for or expected is not itself a reason for appeal. We hope that, by helping you to understand how the Centre Assessment Grade has been reached, some of your questions and concerns may already have been answered.

We are waiting for Ofqual to produce updated guidance about an appeals process, *so this section may be subject to change*. It is likely that there will be a number of different parts to the process.

If you believe that there may be a mistake with your grade, you should ask the school to investigate:

- You can ask the school to check whether it made a mistake when submitting your centre assessment grade to the examination board. This request should be made, giving your name and full details, via the email address [appeals@lordlawson.org.uk](mailto:appeals@lordlawson.org.uk). If the school finds it made a mistake, it can ask the exam board to correct it
- If you think the exam board used the wrong data to assign your grade, or it made a mistake in communicating your grade, you can ask the school to appeal on your behalf. You should give full details of your name and the problem, using the email address [appeals@lordlawson.org.uk](mailto:appeals@lordlawson.org.uk)

If you have concerns about how your Centre Assessment Grade was reached,

- You can ask the school to undertake a **Review of the Grading**. Any request should be submitted to Mr Fowler, as Head of Centre, using the email address [appeals@lordlawson.org.uk](mailto:appeals@lordlawson.org.uk). The reasons or grounds for your request should be explained clearly, and you should provide evidence, if you have it. Remember that your mock mark and grade will already have been taken into account in deciding your Centre Assessment Grade

If you have concerns about our systems:

- We believe that our system has been rigorous, fair and objective. Nonetheless, if you are concerned that the school's system for creating Centre Assessment Grades was not adequate, or that the system we have put in place for considering complaints is not appropriate, you should use the school's complaints process, details of which are available on our website. If your complaint is not resolved, you can speak to the exam board for further guidance.

### [Making a complaint about bias, discrimination or malpractice](#)

In extreme cases, you might believe that your Centre Assessment Grade was wrong because the judgement was influenced by factors other than evidence about your academic achievement. It is possible that some students could be concerned about decisions being influenced by bias or discrimination.

If bias or discrimination affected your Centre Assessment Grade, this could be a form of malpractice or maladministration. If you think that this may have happened in your case, you should discuss this first in confidence with Mr Fowler, as Head of Centre. Such a complaint is likely to be rare, and it will be taken very seriously. Details of how to contact Mr Fowler are given below.

Possible examples of malpractice are given on pages 4-6 of the document produced by Ofqual, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/90952/5/Information\\_for\\_students\\_about\\_malpractice\\_20200814\\_1218\\_-\\_access.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/90952/5/Information_for_students_about_malpractice_20200814_1218_-_access.pdf)

If you believe that there is evidence of malpractice or maladministration in your case, you need to follow the school's complaints policy, a copy of which is available on our website. Please contact Mr Fowler, giving details of your complaint and any supporting evidence. If you feel, once your complaint has been investigated, that your concerns have not been addressed, the complaints policy directs that you contact Mr Smith, Chair of Governors. **Both Mr Fowler and Mr Smith can be contacted via Mrs Wakefield, Principal's PA, on [swakefield1@lordlawson.org.uk](mailto:swakefield1@lordlawson.org.uk).**

Ofqual's document (above) gives details of how to contact the exam board directly if you have concerns about raising your complaint directly with the school.

## Appendix: Centre Assessment Grades – the process in more detail

1. Subject teachers **collected marks** for mock exams and key assessed pieces of work. This included non-examined assessments, or coursework, where this had already been completed
2. Subject leaders, in discussion with teachers and senior leaders, **decided which evidence should be used** in each subject. This will have varied from one subject to another, depending on the work that had been completed. For example, for GCSE students, they may have used a combination of Year 10 mock exams, Year 11 mock exams, any coursework completed, and significant pieces of work that all students had completed. Mock exams often cover no more than a small portion of the course, and the approach taken to the setting and marking of mock exams varies between subjects
3. Subject leaders and teachers then decided **how much weight** to give each piece of work. For example, the Year 11 mock grade, which was more recent and reflected greater coverage of the exam specification, could have been given greater weighting (i.e. it 'counted for more') than a piece of work completed during Year 10
4. Subject leaders and subject teachers **standardised students' work**. This means that they compared the work of different students, different classes and different teachers, to make sure that marks had been awarded fairly and consistently
5. **Students were then ranked**, highest to lowest across the year group, based on all the evidence
6. **Teachers and subject leaders moderated the rankings**, discussing every student, to make sure that all factors had been taken into account fairly. This took place in formal meetings, in person or using video conferencing
7. **Grades were then attached** by subject leaders and teachers, taking into account the actual achievement of similar students from previous years. This grading process was then standardised, to make sure it was fair and consistent
8. **Quality assurance** was carried out by members of the senior leadership team. Quality assurance included a detailed investigation of the evidence used in ranking and grading and questions about the allocation of individual grades, where appropriate. This took place in three stages. First, the line-manager checked the robustness of the subject leader process. Secondly, other members of the senior leadership team verified and validated the quality of line manager checking. Thirdly, the GCSE dataset was submitted to the Fischer Family Trust (FFT) national analysis and research database for checking, and some fine adjustments took place in response to comments received
9. **Grades were entered onto the school's system**. These were checked and double-checked by staff in the examinations office
10. **Accuracy spot checks were carried out** by the Principal, as Head of Centre. 10% of grades were checked (more for small subjects), including grades at all levels. No errors were discovered
11. **Grades were signed off** by the Head of Centre
12. **Grades were submitted to examination boards** by the Examinations Officer