Joint Council for Qualifications CIC

JCQ Student Guide
Summer 2021

What to do if you think there has been an error in your grading

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Introduction

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We're giving you some of the most important information and advice in the guide here, so you have it right at the start.

The exam boards have published a number of documents setting out the arrangements for summer 2021. This guide provides an overview of the appeal process for students, but if you want more information about the guidance for schools and colleges please see the Additional information section in the final section of this guide.

Qualifications covered by this guide

This guide is designed to help you decide what you should do if you have any concerns or questions about your grades for:

- Advanced Extension Award in Maths
- AQA Applied General qualifications
- AQA Entry Level Certificate qualifications
- AQA Level 1, Level 2 and Level 3 Technical qualifications
- Cambridge Nationals
- Cambridge Technicals
- Extended Project Qualification
- FSMQ
- GCE AS and A level
- GCSE
- Level 3 Certificate in Core Maths
- OCR Entry Level Certificate qualifications
- WJEC Entry Level Certificate
- WJEC Level 1/2 Latin
- WJEC Level 1/2 Vocational Awards
- WJEC Level 2 Certificate in Additional Mathematics
- WJEC Level 3 Applied Certificates and Diplomas

If your qualification is not one of these, please refer to the individual exam board's documentation. Students in Wales, Channel Islands, Isle of Man, Scotland and overseas following WJEC General Qualifications should refer to the appeals guidance published by WJEC. Students following Eduqas General Qualifications or WJEC General Qualifications in Northern Ireland should refer to this guide.

Things to do if you don't have the grades you need

A Focus on your progression

1. If you haven't got the grades you need, **talk to the school, college, university or employer you're hoping to go to** as soon as possible. They may still accept you. The Exam Results Helpline offers support for students in these situations.
2. If you can't get onto the course you applied for with your grades, ask if there are other options at the same school, college or university. If not, **talk to other schools, colleges or universities** as soon as possible – they may still have places.

B Understand the appeals process

3. If you believe there is an error that impacted your grade, talk to your school or college. They can give you more information about how your grade was decided.
4. If you are still convinced that an error has been made that impacted your grade after talking to your school or college, you can first request a review from your school or college (a centre review) and after that you may appeal to the exam board (an awarding organisation appeal).

C Consider entering for another exam series

5. If you want to try to improve your grade, you could **consider entering for the autumn exam series or the exam series next summer.** Talk to your school or college about how this will work for you as you may need to revise for those exams and work on your new course at the same time.

Key information about appeals

- If you believe there is an error with your grade, there are **two stages** to the appeals process:
  - » **Stage 1** is to ask your school or college for a centre review. Your school or college will check whether it made a procedural error, an administrative error or both. This allows them to correct any errors they identify, and must be completed before a stage 2 appeal is made.
  - » **Stage 2** is to ask your school or college to submit an awarding organisation appeal for you. You should only progress to stage 2 if you remain concerned with your grade after the completion of stage 1. At stage 2 you can ask the exam board to check whether the decision your school or college made about your grade was unreasonable*, or whether the selection of work they used to decide your grade was unreasonable. You can also ask the exam board to check whether the school or college made a procedural error, or whether the exam board itself made an administrative error.
- **Your grade could go down, go up or stay the same** as a result of the appeals processes at stages 1 and 2 so you should consider carefully whether you have a strong case for an appeal.
- Some errors won't lead to a grade change.
- You cannot withdraw your request for a centre review or appeal once your school or college or the exam board has made a decision.
- You can request a priority appeal if you have missed out on your firm offer for higher education from a university or college (that is the offer you accepted as your first choice), and you wish to appeal an A level or other Level 3 qualification result.

Important dates

- Schools and colleges must submit priority appeals to the exam board by **23 August 2021** and non-priority appeals by **17 September 2021**. However, your school or college will set its own deadlines for receiving your centre review and appeal, which will be earlier than these dates. This is so they can meet the exam board deadlines. **You must check the deadline your own school or college has set.**
- You should tell your intended university or college that you have requested an appeal as soon as possible so they can decide how to handle your offer. For many universities the conditions of your offer must be met by **8 September 2021**, although **you should check the date set by your university or college** as it may differ.
- A level exams in the autumn start on **4 October 2021.** GCSE exams in the autumn start on **1 November 2021.** Your school or college can provide information on entry deadlines for these.

***Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement appeal:**

The focus of this type of appeal will be on whether the selection of evidence and/or the grade you were given was unreasonable. The exam board's independent reviewer will review the selection of evidence used to decide your grade and/or your work. Only if the reviewer decides that the evidence selected and/or your grade were clearly wrong will they decide that your school or college's academic judgement was unreasonable. The reviewer will not uphold (i.e. agree to) your appeal merely because other evidence might have been selected or a different grade could have been given. There is more information about this in the documents listed in the Additional information box in the Useful contacts and resources section.

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Deciding what to do after you've got your results

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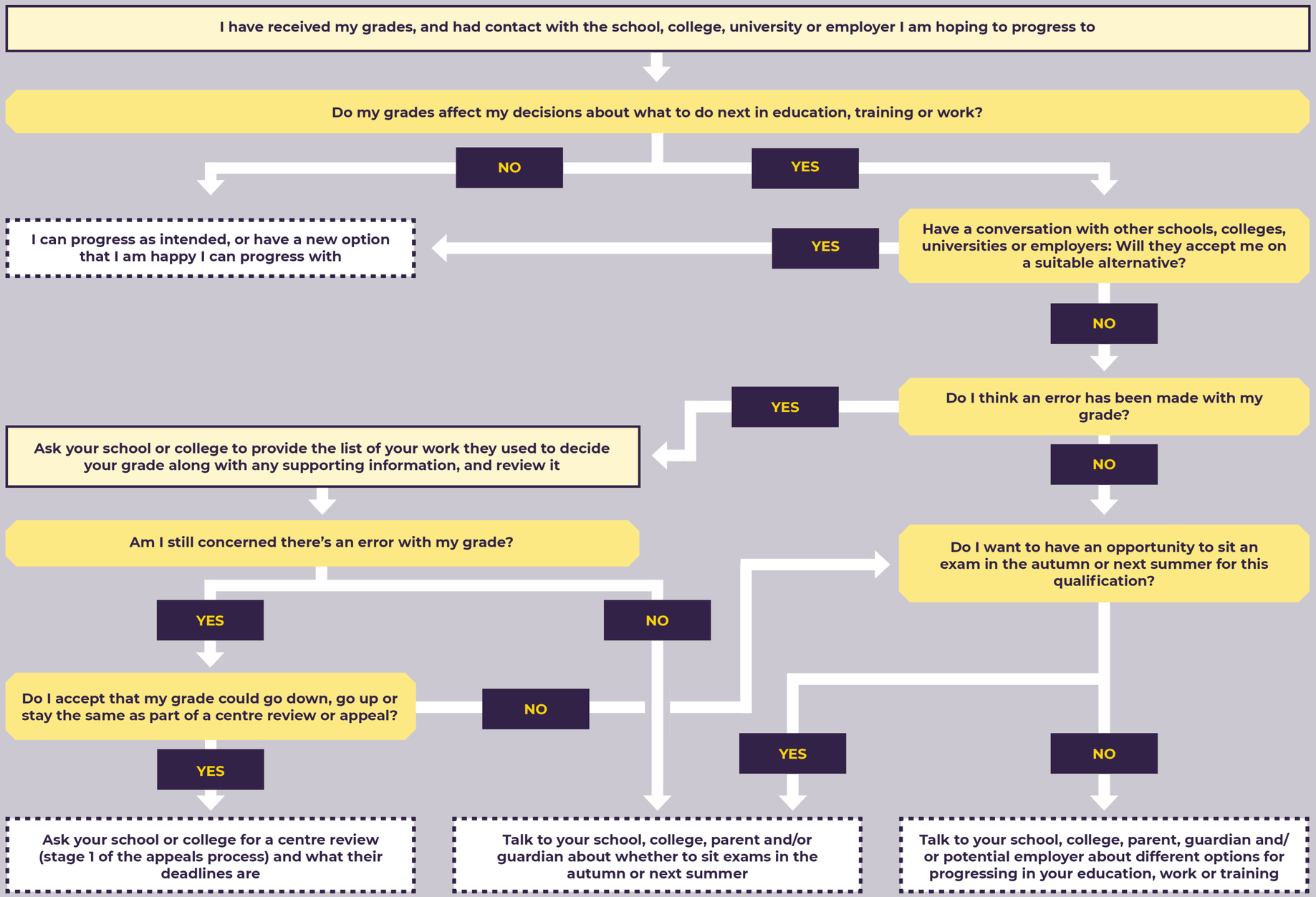

Who to talk to and what to ask

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Steps you can take immediately	Questions you might ask
Talk to the school, college, university or employer you are hoping to go to next – they may still accept you or have places on related courses.	• Can you still accept me with my grades? • What related courses do you have that I could get onto with my grades? • If you aren't able to offer me a place, could you suggest any other school/college/university/employer that might accept me? • Do you think it would be worth me taking the exam this autumn or next summer to try to improve my grade?
Talk to other institutions you might be able to attend (for example your insurance choice or others via UCAS's Clearing service, or post 16 provider as appropriate) – they may still have places.	• What courses do you have that I could get onto with my grades?
Talk to your school or college about your grades – they can give you more information about how your grade was decided. Whether you got the grades you need to progress or not, you can appeal your grade.	• Can you give me: » the centre policy » a list of my work that you used to decide my grade » any grades/marks for the work that you used? • Can you explain how my grade was decided? • What are my options in sitting exams in the autumn or next summer? ***If you believe there might have been an error:*** • Could you have made an administrative error, such as mixing me up with someone else? • How can I request an appeal? ***If you were eligible for any access arrangements/reasonable adjustments:*** • Did you implement and/or take account of my access arrangements/reasonable adjustments? • Where can I see this in the information you have given me? ***If your performance was temporarily impacted at the time you were assessed by a special circumstance outside your control, such as illness:*** • Did you take account of my special circumstance? • Where can I see this in the information you have given me?

Steps you can take immediately	Questions you might ask
Talk to someone who knows you well and who you trust such as your parents/ guardians, friends.	• What do you think I should do? • Can you help me with ...? • Do you know anyone else that has been in a similar position? What did they do?
Talk to someone who understands the process and is independent, for example someone at the Exam Results Helpline or National Careers Service.	• What can I do about this? • What are my options?

Other people you may want to talk to	Questions you can ask
If you have evidence of being unfairly discriminated against, talk to someone who can help with any concerns you might have relating to equalities such as the Equality Advisory and Support Service.	• I think this has happened ... Is this an issue? • What can I do about this? • What are my options? • What does the evidence tell me about this?
If you are having difficulties with mental health or wellbeing, there are lots of organisations that can help including Children and Young People's Mental Health Services, Mind, Young Minds.	• I am struggling with ... • What can I do about this? • Who can help me?

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Requesting a centre review (stage 1)

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Start here

I want to ask my school or college to complete a centre review. I understand that this is the first stage of the appeals process and will not include a review of the judgement of my grade. I accept that my grade could go down, go up or stay the same as part of a centre review.

Fill out the form my school or college asks me to complete by the deadline they have set.

- See page 2 of this guide for more information about important dates.
- The form on page 7 of this guide is an example of the type of form you will have to fill out.
- Talk to your school or college if you are unsure

Send your form to your school or college. They will tell you when you can expect a response

Outcome: does your school or college agree there was an error that impacts your grade?

YES

Your school or college will request a change to your grade and the exam board will decide whether to make the change

Your school or college will inform you of the outcome

Do I want to have an opportunity to sit an exam in the autumn or next summer for this qualification?

NO

Talk to your school, college, parent, guardian and/or potential employer about different options for progressing in your education, work or training

YES

Talk to your school, college, parent and/or guardian about whether to sit an exam in the autumn or next summer

NO

Your school or college will let you know either:
- there was no error
- there was an error, but it does not affect your grade

Am I still concerned there's an error that has impacted my grade?
I accept that my grade could go down, go up or stay the same as part of an appeal

YES

You can submit an appeal to the awarding organisation (stage 2). Complete the form your school or college asks you to complete. (The form on page 11 of this guide is an example of the type of form you will have to fill out.)

Follow the diagram on page 9 for the awarding organisation appeal (stage 2). You can only make one Stage 2 appeal per qualification, so be sure to include all the necessary information in your appeal

If what you want is for an independent subject specialist from the exam board to look at your work and review your grade, you should make this clear in your request for a centre review. You don't have to say there was an administrative or procedural error by your school or college if neither applies.

You must understand whether your appeal is a priority or not. You need to be able to answer yes to all of the following questions for your appeal to be a priority:

- ☐ Have you applied to higher education?
- ☐ Have you got a UCAS personal ID?
- ☐ Have you missed out on your firm choice (the offer you accepted as your first choice?)
- ☐ Are you appealing an A Level or other similar level (Level 3) qualification result?

Writing a centre review request (stage 1)

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If you decide to ask for a centre review, your school or college will ask you to explain what your concerns are. It's important to be as clear as you can about what you think has gone wrong with your grade.

Your school or college will ask you to complete a form as part of this process, so they can record your details and the type of concerns you have. The form may be identical to the one shown on the right – or it may look slightly different. We've included guidance on the information you should include on your form. There are also some questions and answers to help you write a centre review in the FAQs section at the end of this guide.

This is not a legal process. The process has been designed to be accessible to all students and you will not need specialist support to complete the form.

Ask your school, college, parent, guardian or someone else you know for help completing the form if you need it.

This is the name of your school or college

This is the grade you received on results day

Grounds are the reasons for your appeal

Choose this reason if you think a straightforward administrative error has been made by your school or college

In this section, explain clearly and concisely what you think has gone wrong with your grade. For example:

If you think there's been an administrative error, explain the type of error and where you think it has occurred.

If you think your school or college hasn't followed its centre policy correctly, including if you think they didn't take your access arrangements/reasonable adjustments or mitigating circumstances into account, explain the nature of your concerns and the impact you think this has had on your grade

Stage one – centre review

A. Student request

This section is to be completed by the student. A request for a centre review must be submitted to the centre, not the awarding organisation. A centre review must be conducted before an appeal to the awarding organisation. This is so the awarding organisation is certain that your grade is as the centre intended.

Centre Name		Centre Number	
Student Name		Candidate Number	

Qualification title e.g. AQA GCSE English Language			
Teacher Assessed Grade issued			
Is this a priority appeal? A priority appeal is only for students applying to higher education who did not attain their firm choice and wish to appeal an A level or other Level 3 qualification result.	☐ Yes ☐ No	If Yes provide your UCAS personal ID e.g. 123-456-7890	

Grounds for centre review

Please tick one or both of the options if they apply to your request. If you don't think either apply, your centre will still conduct a review for administrative and procedural errors so the awarding organisation can be certain that your grade is as the centre intended.

Administrative Error by the centre e.g. the wrong grade/mark was recorded against an item of evidence	☐	Procedural Error by the centre e.g. a reasonable adjustment / access arrangement was not provided for an eligible student	☐

Supporting evidence

Please provide a short explanation of what you believe went wrong and how you think this has impacted your grade.

There is a 5,000 character limit.

Acknowledgement

I confirm that I am requesting a centre review for the qualification named above and that I have read and understood the information provided in the 'Important information for students' section above. In submitting this review, I am aware that:

- The outcome of the review may result in my grade remaining the **same**, being **lowered** or **raised**
- The next stage (Stage Two, the appeal to awarding organisation) may only be requested once the centre review (Stage One) has been requested and concluded.

Student Name	Student signature	Date

Your school or college will be able to tell you your centre number

Your school or college will be able to tell you your candidate number

If you're submitting a priority appeal, you should let your university or college know and include your UCAS ID here

You don't have to tick either of these options if you don't think they apply. If what you want is for an independent subject specialist from the exam board to look at your work, make this clear in the 'Supporting evidence' section under this box. Your school or college will still do an administrative/ procedural check to make sure you received the grade your school or college intended to give you.

Choose this reason if you think your school or college didn't follow its centre policy correctly

Your grade might go down, go up, or stay the same - and you can't withdraw your centre review once a decision's been made

Remember that you can only ask your school or college to appeal to the exam board once the centre review is complete

Writing a centre review request (stage 1)

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Your school or college will complete this section and will share it with you once your centre review is complete

B. Centre review outcome

This section should be completed by the centre and shared with the student as a record of the outcome of the centre review.

Centre Review Outcome

Please tick the outcome of the review and then record the original grade and the revised grade if applicable.

Upheld	☐	Not upheld	☐	Partially upheld	☐

Original Teacher Assessed Grade		Revised Teacher Assessed Grade if applicable	

Information considered by the centre

Please provide a short explanation of the evidence that you have reviewed. There is a 5,000 character limit.

Rationale for the outcome of the centre review

Outline the centre's findings from the centre review e.g. procedural or administrative error and if relevant, details of the error. There is a 5,000 character limit.

Authorisation and dates of next stages

Please complete the boxes as appropriate. Boxes 1 and 2 **must** be completed in every case. Boxes 3 and 4 need only be completed when requesting a grade change.

1. Date that the decision and rationale was issued to student		2. Date student informed of how to proceed to stage 2 (appeal to awarding organisation)	
3. Confirmation that a senior leader has authorised any grade change		4. Date that grade change is submitted to awarding organisation	

Requesting an awarding organisation appeal (stage 2)

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Before completing the form you need to be clear why you are appealing. Is it because you:

- ☐ Want an independent subject specialist to look at your work and check the grade your school or college gave you?
- ☐ Want an independent subject specialist to check the list of work that your school or college used to decide your grade?
- ☐ Think your school or college failed to implement your access arrangements/reasonable adjustments and failed to take that into account, or failed to take other special circumstances into account?
- ☐ Think your school or college didn't follow its centre policy correctly?
- ☐ Think the exam board made an administrative error when it issued your result?

Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS)

If, when an awarding organisation appeal (stage 2) is complete, you believe the exam board has not followed its procedures properly, you can decide to take your case further to the Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS). Not all qualifications are covered by the EPRS so please check the relevant regulator's website (Ofqual, CCEA Regulation or Qualifications Wales) for more information on whether you can apply and, if so, how to apply.

I want to ask my school or college to ask for an awarding organisation appeal. I accept that my grade could go down, go up or stay the same as part of an appeal

Fill out the form my school or college asks me to complete by the deadline they have set.
(See page 2 of this guide for more information about important dates. The form on page 11 of this guide is an example of the type of form you will have to fill out)

Send your form to your school or college. If it's a priority appeal and is submitted by 23 August, the exam board will do its very best to respond by 8 September, which is the date when the conditions of offers for many universities needs to be met (**Note:** not all universities will guarantee to hold a place until then)

Outcome: does the exam board agree with your appeal?

- NO → The exam board will let your school or college know they agree with the original grade
- YES → Outcome: does the decision change your grade? (The exam board might agree there was an error but it may not be significant enough to change your grade)
  - NO → The exam board will tell your school or college that your appeal has been upheld but that your grade remains unchanged
  - YES → The exam board will change your grade and tell your school and college your new grade. Your grade may go down as well as up

Do I have evidence to disagree with the exam board's decision?

- YES → If you think the exam board has not followed the correct process, you may be able to apply for a procedural review with Ofqual's Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS). See the yellow box on the left for more details.
- NO

Do I want to have an opportunity to sit an exam in the autumn or next summer for this qualification?

At the same time you can consider sitting an exam

- NO → Talk to your school, college, parent, guardian and/or potential employer about different options for progressing in your education, work or training
- YES → Talk to your school, college, parent and/or guardian about whether to sit an exam in the autumn or next summer if you wish to attempt to improve your grade

Deciding on the grounds for an appeal

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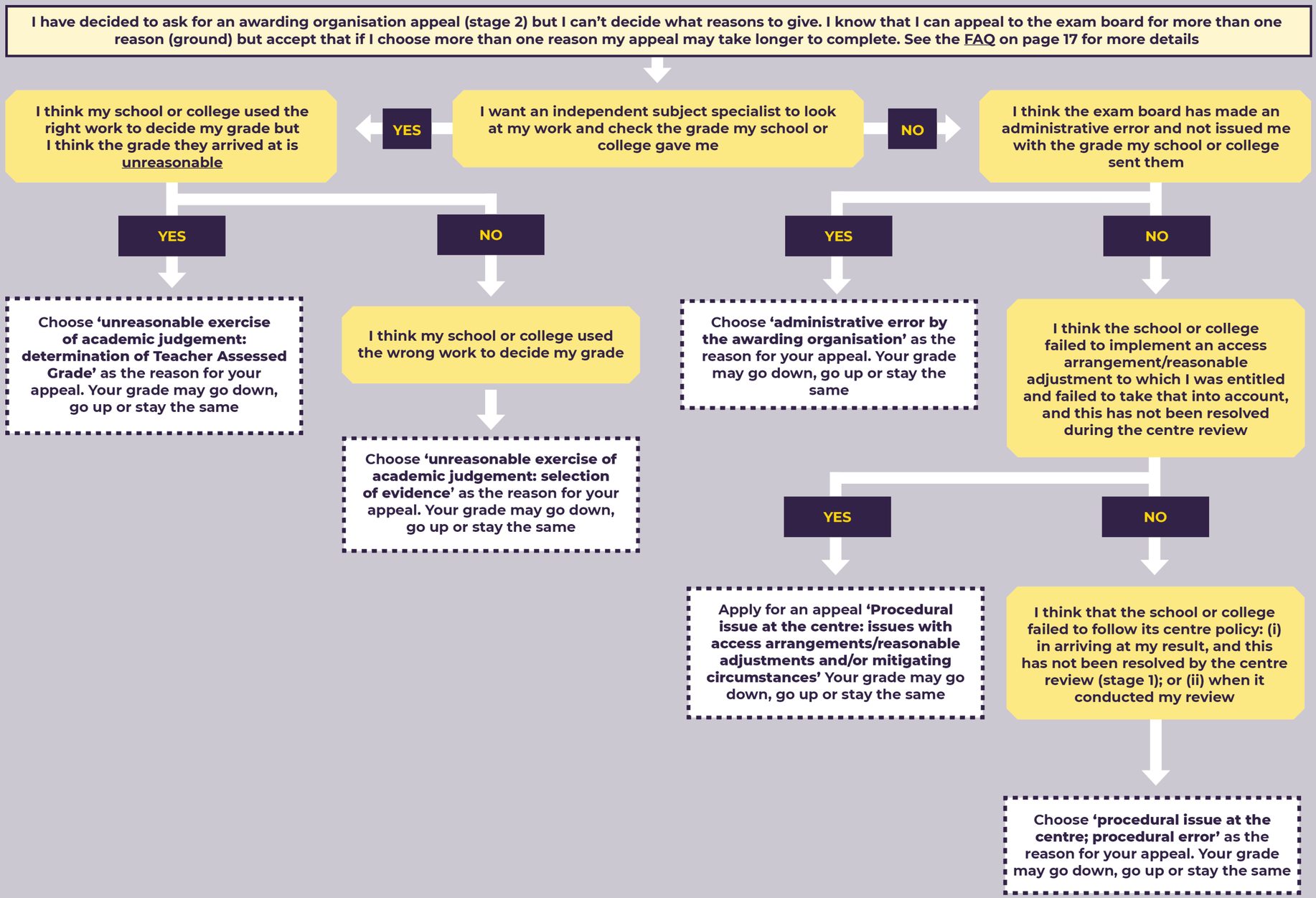
The diagram on the right is designed to help you work out what your concerns are with your grade and what reasons to give when you appeal. You can appeal to the exam board for more than one reason (ground). These reasons are the five white boxes with dotted lines. It may be helpful to go through the whole flow diagram to work out which reason or reasons apply to your situation.

If you decide to request a centre review or appeal, your school or college will ask you to explain what your concerns are. It's important to be as clear as you can about what you think has gone wrong and how it impacted your grade.



Writing an awarding organisation appeal (stage 2)

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Your school or college will ask you to complete a form as part of this process, so they can record your details and the type of concerns you have. It's important to be as clear as you can about what you think has gone wrong and how it impacted your grade. You only need to provide a short explanation of what you believe went wrong and what impact you think this had on your grade.

The form may be identical to the one shown on the right – or it may look slightly different. We've included guidance on the information you should include on your form. There are also some questions and answers to help you write an awarding organisation appeal (stage 2) in the FAQs section at the end of this guide.

This is not a legal process. The process has been designed to be accessible to all students and you will not need specialist support to complete the form.

Grounds are the reasons for your appeal. You have to select at least one ground when appealing to the exam board

Choose this reason if you think the exam board made an administrative error when it issued your result, for example the grade the exam board issued is not the one your school or college sent to the exam board

Choose this reason if you don't think your school or college implemented your access arrangements/reasonable adjustments or didn't sufficiently take them into account. You can also choose this reason if you're concerned that other mitigating circumstances weren't taken into account by your school or college.

If you're appealing for this reason, explain how you think the exam board made an administrative error with your grade and what impact you think this has had on your grade

Stage two – appeal to awarding organisation

This section is to be completed by the student. An awarding organisation appeal must be submitted to the centre and the centre will then submit it to the awarding organisation

Ask your school, college, parent, guardian or someone else you know for help completing the form if you need it

Grounds for appeal Please tick the grounds upon which you wish to appeal	
1. Administrative error by the awarding organisation	☐
2. Procedural issue at the centre	
a. Procedural Error	☐
b. Issues with access arrangements / reasonable adjustments and/or mitigating circumstances	☐
3. Unreasonable exercise of academic judgement	
a. Selection of evidence	☐
b. Determination of Teacher Assessed Grade	☐

Choose this reason if you think your school or college did not follow the process set out in its centre policy

Choose this reason if you would like an independent subject specialist to check your teacher's selection of evidence

Choose this reason if you want an independent subject specialist to check the grade your school or college gave you

Evidence to support an appeal

Please provide a short explanation of what you believe went wrong and how you think this has impacted your grade where that relates to your chosen ground for appeal. In some cases you must provide a clear reason but it doesn't have to be lengthy.

1. Administrative error by the awarding organisation

You **must** provide a clear explanation. There is a 5,000 character limit.

2 (a) Procedural Error

This is when the centre made a procedural error that has not been corrected at Stage One or the centre did not conduct its review properly and consistently. If you can, please add a further explanation below or alternatively refer to the information that you have already provided above. There is a 5,000 character limit.

If you're appealing for this reason, please state clearly which part of the centre policy you think your school or college didn't apply correctly and how you think this has made a difference to your grade

Writing an awarding organisation appeal (stage 2)

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If you're appealing for this reason, explain clearly and concisely why you believe your school or college didn't implement your access arrangements/reasonable adjustments and how this hasn't sufficiently been taken into account. You can also use this ground if you believe your school or college hasn't sufficiently taken into account mitigating circumstances when deciding your grade

If you're appealing for this reason, explain clearly and concisely why you think your school or college made an unreasonable academic judgement when deciding your grade, based on the evidence they used

Your grade could go down, go up, or stay the same – and you can't withdraw your appeal once a decision's been made

2 (b) Issues with access arrangements / reasonable adjustments and/or mitigating circumstances

You **must** provide a clear explanation of what you believe went wrong and how you think this has impacted on your grade. There is a 5,000 character limit.

3 (a) Selection of evidence

You **must** provide a clear explanation of what you believe went wrong and how you think this has impacted on your grade. There is a 5,000 character limit.

3 (b) Determination of the Teacher Assessed Grade

You can provide a short explanation of the reason for your appeal if you want to. There is a 5,000 character limit.

Acknowledgement

I confirm that I am requesting an appeal for the qualification named above and that I have read and understood the information provided in the 'Important information for students' section above.

I am aware that:

- The outcome of the appeal may result in my grade remaining the same, being lowered or raised
- I understand that there is no further opportunity to appeal to the awarding organisation and that the next stage would be to contact the regulator. The awarding organisation will include the next appropriate steps, where applicable, in their appeal outcome letter which you will receive from your school/college.

Student name	Student signature	Date

If you're appealing for this reason, explain clearly and concisely why you think your school or college made an unreasonable academic judgement when deciding which evidence they should use to decide your grade

Once you've received your appeal outcome, the exam board's decision is final – although you may be able to submit a procedural review to Ofqual, CCEA Regulation or Qualifications Wales if you think the exam board didn't follow its appeals process

Case studies

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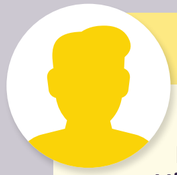
Dwayne – A level student

One of Dwayne's A-level grades is two grades lower than he expected. He had really good marks and grades for all of the pieces of work the college told him would be used to make its grading decision.

Dwayne contacts his college and asks for a centre review (stage 1) to check whether there has been an administrative error.

The college finds that it submitted a grade that was 2 grades higher than the one the exam board has issued for Dwayne.

Dwayne uses stage 2 of the appeals process because the outcome of the centre review indicates that the exam board has made a mistake and issued him with the wrong grade. He asks the college to submit an appeal on the basis of an awarding organisation administrative error.



Sam – GCSE student

Sam has completed his GCSEs. He feels his grade in GCSE History is a grade lower than he wanted. He knows some pieces of his work were not as good as he would have liked but he thought his teacher knew that he tried hard and really liked history. He also did a really good project in the winter holidays and he thinks his teacher should have used that to decide his grade.

Sam talks to his school, and they explain why they decided to use certain pieces of student work. Sam still feels disappointed with his grade, but he understands the approach the school took, and he can see that they were fair in looking at the same pieces for work for him and all his classmates. Sam decides not to ask for a centre review (stage 1) and continues to talk to his school about entering for the exam in the autumn so he can try to improve his grade.

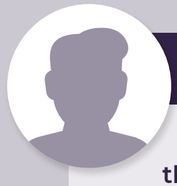
Priti – A level student

Priti is shocked at one of her A level grades. It will mean that she may not get her university place to start her degree. Her work always received high marks and she knows that all of the assessments the school required her to take to inform their grading decision went really well and received high marks.

Priti speaks to her school and asks for a centre review (stage 1) to check that they did not make an administrative error when they sent her grade to the exam board. She also contacts the university she wants to attend to tell them that she has asked for a centre review and to discuss whether they can accept her if her grade doesn't change.

The school carries out the centre review and finds an error. They made a data entry mistake and sent the exam board the wrong grade for one of Priti's A levels.

The school contacts the exam board to have the error corrected. There is no need for Priti to make a stage 2 appeal. The school can apply to have her grade changed because it was a centre error. With the support of her school, Priti contacts the university and tells them that the error is being corrected so they can keep her place open for her.



Bobbie – A level student

Bobbie thinks there must have been a mistake made with one of their A level grades. It is much lower than expected. Bobbie did well in the assessments/pieces of work the school used to decide grades.

Bobbie speaks to the school and asks them to check that they followed the right procedure and that they did not make an administrative error when they sent the grade to the exam board.

The school carries out the centre review (stage 1) and does not find any error in either procedure or administration.

Bobbie considers the outcome of the review the centre has undertaken and thinks about whether to apply for a stage 2 appeal. Bobbie understands that the grade could go down, go up, or stay the same. On the basis of evidence from the assessments used Bobbie decides the school must have been unreasonable when they were considering what grade to send to the exam board. Bobbie decides to go onto stage 2 of the appeals process. Bobbie asks the school to submit an appeal on the ground of academic judgement ('Determination of Teacher Assessed Grade') so the grade can be checked by an independent person.

Case studies

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Sapphire – GCSE student

Sapphire believes there must have been a mistake – her GCSE maths grade is a grade lower than she expected. She was ill during the time when the school was conducting the assessments that were used to decide her grade. She does not think the school took that into account in deciding her grade.

Sapphire contacts her school and asks for a centre review (stage 1) to check that the school took her illness at the time of the assessments into account when they were deciding her grade.

The school carries out the centre review and does not find an error. The school tells Sapphire how they took her illness into account.

Sapphire decides to go on to stage 2 of the appeals process because she believes that the school did not make enough of an adjustment in response to her illness. She understands that the outcome of the appeal may be that her grade goes down, goes up or stays the same. She decides to ask the school to submit an appeal on the basis of a centre procedural error.

Elsa – GCSE student

Elsa feels her Biology GCSE grade is a little bit lower than she hoped for. She feels her work was sometimes of a good standard and she wants to do Biology at A level so would like a higher grade.

Elsa contacts the school and asks for a centre review (stage 1) to check that the school did not make an administrative error when they sent her grade to the exam board.

The school carries out the centre review and finds that it made an administrative error in sending the grade to the exam board. However, the school tells Elsa that they intended to submit a lower grade for her. They inform Elsa that, following careful consideration, they will be arranging for her grade to be changed to a lower grade.

Elsa is upset that her grade has gone down but she understood when she consented to the centre review that a lower grade was a potential outcome. She thinks about going to stage 2. However, now that she has spoken to the school she understands why they decided on the lower grade for her and decides not to go any further. She continues to talk to the school about her A level options.

Darcey – GCSE private candidate

Darcey was home-educated and worked with a local school to ensure she received her exam grades. She feels her English GCSE grade is much lower than she expected as her tutor always gave her very positive feedback about her work in this subject and she anticipated that she would receive one of the highest grades.

Darcey contacts the school and asks for a centre review (stage 1) to check that the school did not make an administrative error and followed its procedure properly when they were deciding her grade.

The school carries out the centre review and finds that it conducted its procedure properly but that it made an administrative error in sending the grade to the exam board. They inform Darcey that they will be arranging for her grade to be changed to the next grade up.

Darcey is pleased that her grade has been improved. She thinks about going to stage 2 as she still thinks she could have got a higher grade. However, now that the school has reviewed the grade she feels more confident about it and decides not to go any further. She knows that the outcome of an appeal to the exam board could be that her grade goes down, goes up or stays the same. She considers whether to take the exam in the autumn.

Learning more about your grade

I want more information about how my grade was decided. What should I do?

If you'd like more information about how your grade was decided, speak to your school or college. You might find it helpful to ask them for the following information, if you haven't received it already:

- the pieces of work that they used to decide your grade – including the grades and marks you received for your work
- your school or college's centre policy document, which explains their approach to grading students this summer
- details of any considerations they took into account which were relevant for you, for example access arrangements/reasonable adjustments or personal circumstances such as illness
- guidance on your school or college's appeals process.

We've included some possible questions you might want to ask if you'd like more information about your grade, or if you'd like support with your next steps.

I'm concerned that other schools and colleges took a different approach to my school or college – is this fair?

All schools and colleges had to follow guidance from Ofqual and the JCQ (Joint Council for Qualifications) this summer. Each school or college was required to have a centre policy, which explained in detail how they would decide students' grades. Schools and colleges have had these policies, and in some cases a sample of their grades, checked by exam boards. You can request a copy of your school or college's centre policy if you haven't received it already.

Your school or college will have made its own decisions about exactly which evidence to consider when deciding your grade, and how that evidence should be used. Other schools and colleges may have taken a different approach because of the way the pandemic has impacted them. This doesn't mean your school or college's approach was wrong – and it's important to remember that schools/colleges and exam boards had quality assurance checks in place to make sure grades were fair and consistent.

I'm concerned that the evidence used to decide my grade is different from other students in my class – is this fair?

Teachers have been advised to use the same evidence across the class or cohort wherever possible. However, there may be some cases where teachers have used different pieces of work for certain students, for example because those students were ill at the time of an assessment. If you're concerned about the evidence that was used to decide your grade, speak to your school or college in the first instance.

I don't think my school or college took my access arrangements/reasonable adjustments or special circumstances into account when deciding my grade. What should I do?

Schools and colleges were asked to take students' access arrangements/reasonable adjustments and/or special circumstances into account when deciding students' grades. If you're concerned that this didn't happen, speak to your school or college and ask them which information they took into account when deciding your grade.

If you remain concerned after speaking to your school or college, you can request a centre review. If you're still concerned after a centre review has taken place, you can ask your school or college to appeal to the exam board on procedural grounds.

I'm a private candidate with concerns about my grade – what should I do?

This year's appeals process is the same for private candidates. If you're concerned about your grade, speak to the school or college that entered you.

If you're still concerned, you can start this year's appeals process by asking the school or college that entered you for a centre review (stage 1). If you still think there's been an error with how your school or college has completed your centre review, you can ask them to submit a stage 2 appeal to the exam board on your behalf.

I think my grade is wrong because my school or college may have discriminated against me. What can I do?

Schools and colleges received guidance on how to make objective decisions about students' grades. Each grade will have been signed off by at least two teachers in the subject, one being the head of department or subject lead, and by the Head or Principal of your school or college.

If you're concerned that your grade is wrong because you were discriminated against by your school or college, you can request that they carry out a centre review on administrative and/or procedural grounds. If you're still concerned that there's been an error with your grade after receiving the outcome of the centre review, you can ask your school or college to submit a stage 2 appeal to the exam board on the grounds that the school or college's academic judgement was unreasonable, and/or because you think they didn't follow their procedure in determining your grade.

If you appeal on the grounds of unreasonable academic judgement, an independent reviewer from the exam board will consider whether or not your school or college has used unreasonable academic judgement. If they do think your school or college has used unreasonable academic judgement, they'll consider whether your grade needs to be changed.

During your appeal, the exam board will consider whether your grade has been affected by an unreasonable academic judgement and/or by a procedural error. If they find an error's been made with your grade, they'll take action. The exam board is only able to consider decisions made in connection with the determination of your grade. The exam board can't make a judgement on whether bias or discrimination has taken place more broadly during your time at school or college.

If you're concerned that you have been discriminated against on the basis of a protected characteristic (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation) you can discuss this with your school or college and raise a complaint with them if you remain dissatisfied. You can also speak to the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) for advice on discrimination concerns. EASS advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights.

It's important to note that your grade could only be changed if you follow this year's appeals process and your appeal is upheld. Your grade won't be reviewed by EASS.

Requesting a centre review (stage 1)

I believe there's been an error with my grade. What should I do?

Your school or college has been offered training, support and guidance to help them determine your grade. Exam boards also had checks in place to make sure your school or college took the right approach.

If you're concerned there's been an error with your grade, speak to your school or college. They'll be able to explain how your grade was decided. If you'd like to try and improve your grade, you might want to consider taking exams in the autumn series. You could also contact the Exam Results Helpline and speak to a careers adviser about your next steps.

If, once you've spoken to your school or college, you're concerned that there might have been an error with your grade, you can ask your school or college for a centre review. This is the first stage of this year's appeals process. You can find out more information here.

Will my grade be protected?

No. Your grade could go down, go up, or stay the same as the result of a centre review and you can't withdraw your request once a decision has been made. You'll need to give your consent before a centre review takes place.

What happens during a centre review?

If you've asked your school or college for a centre review, they'll check your grade hasn't been affected by any administrative or procedural errors. They won't re-mark your work as part of this process.

If your school or college does find that they've made an error and it's impacted on your grade, they'll ask the exam board to change your grade. Your grade could go down, go up, or stay the same as the result of a centre review and you can't withdraw your centre review once a decision has been made.

You can find out more about the centre review process here.

My school or college has rejected my centre review request because they've said my request wasn't for a valid reason. Can I appeal directly to the exam board?

Your school or college cannot reject your centre review request because they don't think it's valid. If your school or college would like further information about the reason you're requesting a centre review, provide this if you can.

Schools and colleges must accept and process any request for a centre review from a student (including private candidates) that is made before the relevant deadline. If you've spoken to your school and college and you're concerned that they aren't processing your centre review, you should contact the relevant exam board, who may investigate this as malpractice and contact the school on your behalf.

My school or college has rejected my centre review request because I missed their deadline. Can I appeal directly to the exam board?

No – you must receive the outcome of your centre review before being able to ask your school or college to appeal to the exam board. **You should make your request for a centre review by the deadline your school or college has given.**

If you've missed your school or college's deadline, you should contact them and explain the reasons why you missed the deadline. Your school or college will consider whether your request has been made before the exam board deadline for appeals and whether there are any exceptional circumstances that warrant accepting your request.

Is there a deadline for requesting a centre review?

The deadline by which your school or college must submit an appeal on your behalf to the exam board is **17 September** (or **23 August** if you want your appeal to be considered as a priority because you haven't had your first choice of university place confirmed).

Your school or college will set its own deadline for receiving your appeal, which will be earlier than these dates. **You must check the deadline your own school or college has set.** Your school or college must undertake its own review before it can send an appeal to the exam board.

I've had a centre review and I'm still concerned about my grade. What should I do?

If you've received the outcome of your centre review and you still believe there's been an error with your grade, you can consider asking your school or college to submit a stage 2 appeal to the exam board on your behalf. You can do this whether or not your centre review led to a grade change.

Your grade could go down, go up, or stay the same as the result of the exam board appeal and you can't withdraw your appeal once a decision (also known as a 'finding') has been made.

Requesting an awarding organisation appeal (stage 2)

Will my grade be protected?

No. Your grade could go down, go up, or stay the same as the result of a stage 2 appeal and you can't withdraw your request once a decision (also known as a 'finding') has been made. You'll need to give your consent before a stage 2 appeal takes place and you'll also need to have completed stage 1 of the appeals process (centre review).

What grounds can I appeal on?

You can appeal on any of the following grounds:

- you believe your school or college failed to follow the process set out in its centre policy
- you believe your school or college made an unreasonable academic judgement when deciding your grade based on the evidence they used
- you believe your school or college made an unreasonable academic judgement when deciding which evidence they should use to determine your grade
- you believe the exam board made an administrative error.

In your appeal application, explain clearly why you believe your grade is incorrect and should be changed.

If you're not sure which ground to appeal on, have a look at our flowchart. You can also read our case studies, where we explore the different options available to you once you have received your grades.

Can I appeal to the exam board on more than one ground?

Yes, you can appeal on more than one ground if you want to – but you should only submit one appeal per subject. Please bear in mind that appeals submitted on more than one ground may take longer to complete.

Can I appeal to the exam board directly?

No. Your school or college needs to submit the appeal on your behalf – this includes private candidates.

How do I know which evidence my school or college has included with my stage 2 appeal to the exam board?

Speak to your school or college about the evidence you want to be included with your stage 2 appeal application. You can also list the evidence you'd like them to submit on your stage two appeal request form. We've an example of the form here.

What will happen during a stage 2 appeal?

This will depend on which ground(s) you've appealed on. If you've appealed on procedural grounds, exam boards will check whether there's evidence to suggest that your school or college didn't follow its centre policy when deciding your grade. If you're appealing on this ground you should tell us which part of your school or college's centre policy you think they've not applied correctly.

If you're concerned that access arrangements/reasonable adjustments haven't been implemented or considered by your school or college, and/or that your special/mitigating circumstances haven't been taken into account, you should appeal on procedural grounds.

If you've appealed because you think your school or college has:

- made an unreasonable academic judgement in relation to your grade
- and/or made an unreasonable academic judgement when they decided which pieces of work to use

the exam board will ask an independent reviewer to consider your concerns. The independent reviewer won't re-mark your work or change your grade just because they think you could have been given a different grade. They'll only change your grade if they find that your school or college made an unreasonable academic judgement when deciding your grade, or when deciding which pieces of work to use.

If you've appealed because you think the exam board has made an administrative error, they'll check that no administrative errors were made when they processed and issued your grade.

If, during your appeal, exam boards find that an error has been made with your grade, they will either issue you a revised grade, or ask your school or college to reconsider your grade. Your grade could go down, go up or stay the same and you can't withdraw your appeal once a decision (also known as a 'finding') has been made.

Are exam boards offering a priority appeals service?

Yes. A priority appeal is only for students applying to higher education who did not attain their firm choice (the offer they accepted as their first choice) and who wish to appeal an A-level or other Level 3 qualification result.

If your university place is dependent on the outcome of your appeal, include your UCAS personal ID on the appeal application and notify your preferred university as soon as possible.

How long will my stage 2 appeal take?

For priority appeals, where a higher education place is dependent on the outcome, exam boards will aim to complete these appeals by the UCAS deadline of 8 September, as long as your school or college has submitted your application by the priority deadline of 23 August.

For non-priority appeals, exam boards will aim to complete the appeal within 42 calendar days of the application being submitted by your school or college.

The deadline by which your school or college must submit an appeal on your behalf to the exam board is 17 September (or 23 August if you want your appeal to be considered as a priority because you haven't had your first choice of university place confirmed).

My school or college won't submit an appeal. What should I do?

Schools and colleges must accept and process any request for a centre review or stage 2 appeal from a student (including private candidates) that is made before the relevant deadline. Please discuss any concerns with your school and college in the first instance.

If you've spoken to your school and college and you're still concerned that they aren't processing your centre review or stage 2 appeal, you should contact the relevant exam board, who may investigate this as malpractice and contact the school on your behalf. Exam boards are only likely to investigate if you submitted your centre review/stage 2 appeal request to your school or college before the relevant deadline.

How will I receive the outcome of my stage 2 appeal?

The exam board will send the outcome to your school or college and they'll share it with you – so make sure your school or college has the correct contact details for you.

I've had the outcome of my stage 2 appeal and I'm still not happy. What can I do?

You may be able to apply for a procedural review to the Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) run by the exam board regulators. Not all qualifications are covered by the EPRS so please check the relevant regulator's website (Ofqual, CCEA Regulation or Qualifications Wales) for more information on whether you can apply and, if so, how to apply. During this process, the EPRS will consider whether the exam board has followed its procedures. It won't consider whether you got the right grade based on the evidence of your work. The exam board's final decision on your grade will stand unless the EPRS finds that the exam board made an error in its review procedure – and even if an error is found, your grade may stay the same.

If you're unhappy with your grade and want to try and improve it, you can consider taking exams in the autumn series or next summer.

Glossary

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To the right we have provided an explanation for some of the terms we have used within the guide. If you require any further help, please talk to your school, college or the university, college or school you intend to go to next.

Academic judgement

In the context of appeals against summer 2021 examination grades, 'academic judgement' refers to the decision made by your school or college about: (a) what evidence (i.e. your work) the teachers took into account to decide your grade and (b) what grade to give you based on that evidence.

Access arrangements

Are agreed before an assessment. They allow students with specific needs, such as special educational needs, disabilities or temporary injuries to access the assessment and show what they know and can do without changing the demands of the assessment. Please also refer to our definition of 'Reasonable adjustment' for further information.

Administrative and/or procedural errors

As part of a centre review, your school or college will ensure that they have followed the necessary steps in deciding your grade. As part of this process, they will identify any administrative errors, for example input of incorrect grade(s), or procedural errors, for example they failed to follow the correct process. As a result, your grades may go down, go up or stay the same.

Awarding organisations (sometimes known as awarding bodies or exam boards)

Are responsible for setting and awarding general qualifications and vocational qualifications which are offered to students. Awarding organisations set assessments and exam papers, mark or moderate these materials and award a grade based on the students' achievements under normal circumstances. This year, much of this work has been done by your teacher/lecturer.

Awarding organisation appeal

Can be requested if you believe there is still an error with your grade after your school or college has completed its centre review. This is the second stage of the appeals process. As part of this stage you can ask for an independent subject specialist from the exam board to look at your work and review your grade. You can also ask for other checks. As a result of this review, your grade may go down, go up or stay the same.

Centre policy

All schools and colleges were required to submit a centre policy to their respective awarding organisation(s). The policy outlined their approach in determining your grades, and what processes, procedures and safeguarding mechanisms that they would put in place to ensure they applied a fair and consistent approach.

Centre review

Can be requested if you believe there is an error in the grade you have received. This is the first stage of the appeals process. As part of this review, your school or college will examine their approach in determining your grade(s), ensuring they have followed all the necessary steps and aiming to identify any administrative or procedural errors. As a result of this review, your grade may go down, go up or stay the same.

Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS)

This is the final route of appeal following the outcome(s) of the centre review and your stage 2 appeal to the relevant exam board. The relevant regulator will check that the exam board has followed procedures in managing the appeal. It will not consider whether you got the right grade based on the evidence of your work. The exam board's final decision on your grade will stand unless the EPRS finds that the exam board made an error in its review procedure. Even if an error is found, your grade may stay the same.Not all qualifications are covered by the EPRS so please check the relevant regulator's website (Ofqual, CCEA Regulation or Qualifications Wales) for more information on whether you can apply and, if so, how to apply.

Independent reviewer

Will be a subject expert appointed by the exam board and trained to evaluate appeals. The independent reviewer will have no personal interest in the decision being appealed and will evaluate any appeal made on the grounds that there was an 'unreasonable exercise of academic judgement' by your school or college.

Ofqual

The exams regulator for England which regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments. The regulator for Northern Ireland is CCEA Regulation and the regulator for Wales is Qualifications Wales.

Priority appeal

For students applying to a higher education institution who did not attain their firm choice, i.e. the offer they accepted as their first choice, and wish to appeal an A level or other Level 3 qualification result, priority will be given for their appeal.

Reasonable adjustment

The Equality Act 2010 requires all exam boards to make reasonable adjustments where a student, who has a disability, would be at a substantial disadvantage in comparison to someone who is not disabled. For example, an assessment paper made available in Braille would be a reasonable adjustment for a student with a visual impairment who can read Braille. Please also refer to our definition of 'Access arrangements' for further information.

Special circumstance/ consideration

Students whose performance in an assessment is affected by circumstances beyond their control (for example illness, bereavement and so on) may be entitled to special consideration.

Unreasonable academic judgement

The focus of this type of appeal will be on whether the selection of evidence and/or the grade you were given was unreasonable. The exam board's independent reviewer will review the selection of evidence used to decide your grade and/or your work. Only if the reviewer decides that the evidence selected and/or your grade were clearly wrong will they decide that your school or college's academic judgement was unreasonable. The reviewer will not uphold (i.e. agree to) your appeal merely because other evidence might have been selected or a different grade could have been given. There is more information about this in the documents listed in the Additional information box in the Useful contacts and resources section.

Useful contacts and resources

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If you require additional support and guidance that is not available from your school, college or the education provider/employer you are intending to go to next, we have pulled together a list of useful contacts and resources to support you.

Several organisations listed in the table on the right also offer emotional support by trained individuals if you feel you cannot talk to a parent, guardian or someone you trust.

Regulatory and support services

Organisation	Contact
Children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS)	CYPMHS is a NHS-funded service that work with children and young people who have difficulties with their mental health or wellbeing. https://www.nhs.uk/mental-health/nhs-voluntary-charity-services/nhs-services/children-young-people-mental-health-services-cypmhs/
Equality Advisory Support Service (EASS)	EASS provides advice and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights. Tel: 0808 800 0082 Textphone:0808 800 0084 www.equalityadvisoryservice.com OPENING HOURS: Monday - Friday: 9am - 7pm, Saturday: 10am - 2pm
Exam Results Helpline	The Exams Results Helpline is offered by the National Careers Service and provides free, impartial and personalised support for students with their results. Tel: 08080 100 900 https://nationalcareers.service.gov.uk/ OPENING HOURS: Monday – Friday: 8am - 8pm, Saturday: 10am – 5pm
Mind	Mind provides advice and support to help anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Tel: 0300 123 3393 https://www.mind.org.uk/ OPENING HOURS: Monday – Friday: 9am - 6pm
NHS 111	NHS 111 provides advice and guidance to support your mental health. https://111.nhs.uk/
Ofqual	Ofqual regulates qualifications, examinations and assessments in England. Tel: 0300 303 3344 https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/ofqual Standard opening times: Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm. Results week opening times: Mon 9th Aug 9am to 5pm, Tues 10th Aug to Fri 13th Aug, 8am to 6pm, Sat 14th and Sun 15th Aug, 9am to 5pm, Mon 16th Aug, 8am to 6pm Calls charged at your standard network rate.
UCAS	UCAS is an independent charity, that provides information, advice and admissions services, primarily for higher education institutions. Tel: 0371 468 0 468 www.ucas.com Lines open Monday to Friday, 8:30am to 6pm, calls charged at your standard network rate.
Young Minds	Young Minds provides young people with reassurance and advice to help them make positive choices for their mental health and what to do next if they are struggling. https://youngminds.org.uk/

Exam boards / Awarding organisations

AQA	Tel: 0800 197 7162 www.aqa.org.uk
OCR	Tel: 01223 553 998 www.ocr.org.uk
Pearson	Tel: 0345 618 0440 www.pearson.com
WJEC/Eduqas	Tel: 029 2026 5465 www.wjec.co.uk / www.eduqas.co.uk

Additional information

Ofqual's Student guide to awarding summer 2021	Information for students about this year's assessment arrangements from Ofqual
Ofqual's Student guide to Exam Procedures Review Service	Information from Ofqual for students about this year's approach to Ofqual's Exam Procedures Review Service
Ofqual's Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades: summer 2021	The Ofqual document that set out the arrangements for this year for schools and colleges submitting teacher assessed grades
JCQ Guidance on the determination of grades for A/AS Levels and GCSEs for Summer 2021	The exam boards' detailed guidance that your school or college needed to follow when deciding grades for GCSEs, AS and A levels this year
JCQ's A guide to appeals processes Summer 2021 series	The exam boards' detailed guidance that your school or college needed to follow and be aware of in relation to the appeals processes for the qualifications listed at the start of this guide
JCQ's Summer 2021 FAQs Appeals	The exam boards' answers to questions that schools or colleges might want to ask

JCQ CIC

Joint Council for Qualifications CIC

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