

Centre Assessed Grades – the approach used at Peter Symonds College

In May this year our subject teams had the task of awarding centre assessed grades and rankings for every student in every subject. In all, over 5,200 grades were awarded. These grades were then sent to the awarding bodies (exam boards) for processing and statistical standardisation.

The key thing that subject teams had to decide was the ranking for each student. The work that awarding bodies did was focused on deciding the overall grade profile for our students in each subject. Our rank orders then determined which students got which grade.

This document outlines the approach we took, and is designed to help students understand how we used different forms of evidence to come to our grades and rankings. We planned this work very carefully, and built in a number of tests to ensure that the grades and ranks awarded were correct. We asked teachers to identify a 'holistic' grade for each student, based on everything they knew about a student, and then an evidence grade, based on the work they had submitted during the course. In each subject there was a process comparing the grades of different students and merging and testing the judgements from different classes.

We gave all teachers training and guidance regarding the process and what things they should and should not include in their deliberations

Evidence that subject teams were instructed to use

Performance in class – we considered the full range of skills and understanding required for success on each individual course, but were careful not to penalise 'quiet' students: we recognised that a relatively quiet student may be relatively quiet because they prefer to be quiet, not because they are struggling to master the content.

Performance in assignments – this was particularly useful where the entire year group had been set a common group of assignments.

Performance in recent mock exams – while the lower sixth end of year exams were a bit 'historical' to be used in this process, most subjects had recently run mock exams

Performance in coursework and other centre assessed work – while we did not have to send coursework to the exam board, many students had complete or almost complete coursework pieces available.

Progress grades – progress are a form of centre assessed grade but they are not the same as a prediction of what a student would achieve. done well, progress grades should be an excellent source of evidence for the centre assessed grades. The centre assessed grades were reviewed against recent progress grades.

Average GCSE scores and subject specific target grades – as an extra check subject teams looked at average GCSE scores and subject specific target grades produce a useful insight as to how students performed the last time they sat public examinations.

Performance of other students in previous years – teachers used their understanding how much students tend to improve in the final months of the course in considering the grade

Study support information – we took into account is the impact of the access arrangements that individual students may have (such as extra time, a scribe, a small exam room, and so forth). Our grades reflected what we thought students could achieve with the adjustments in place.

It is important to note that it is the access arrangement that is the important piece of evidence, not the underlying issue that leads to the access arrangement.

Special consideration information – there are no arrangements for ‘special consideration’ this year, but we considered what we know about the relationship between a student’s pastoral context and the work that they produced at particular points in the course. For example, if a student suffered a bereavement the day before a mock exam, then we considered performance in that exam in light of that circumstance. This is not the same as giving someone a higher grade because they have challenging circumstances.

Evidence that subject teams were instructed not to use

Work produced since college closure –The work that is produced by a student reflects the circumstances of its creation. Students with access to private study space with reliable broadband connections are better able to manage home-working than other students. There is also the question of the integrity of a test or mock produced under un-managed conditions, and the extent to which students have received support from parents, private tutors, or google. Teachers were instructed to ignore any work produced since the start of lockdown.

Predicted grades – predicted grades are by their very nature optimistic, and are a point in time judgement of potential. For UCAS predicted grades, this particular point in time can be a full year before final examinations, so these were not used in the process.

Lower sixth end of year exams – lower sixth exams provide a rich source of evidence, but again, these represent a point in time analysis a full year before when final exams were due to happen

University offers – we did not look at the grades students needed to secure places at their chosen universities. This would have risked giving student higher grades because they needed higher grades to get in to their chosen course.

Nick Allen 8 August, 2020