

Ensuring the resilience of the qualifications system in 2023: GCSE, AS, A level, Project and AEA

Question 1

Do you agree that this proposed guidance is helpful in guiding schools and colleges to collect and retain evidence in a proportionate way in line with their existing arrangements to help determine TAGs in the unlikely event exams do not go ahead as planned?

Agree

Please add any comments to explain your response.

NGA welcomes that the Department for Education and Ofqual are proactively consulting on contingency arrangements in the event that exams and assessments next summer cannot take place. NGA advocate for an examination system that enables all pupils to be able to perform to the best of their ability and move forward onto the next steps of education or move forward into employment.

As an organisation that supports the practice of governing boards, NGA would like the proposed guidance to set out the role and expectations of governing boards should exams and assessments not take place in 2023. There are many factors within these arrangements that governing boards would provide oversight of, however there is very little in this guidance that would support governing boards to provide this oversight effectively and in a way that retains the best interests of staff and pupils. NGA offers its support to the DfE and Ofqual in developing support within this guidance for governing boards.

Question 2

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the guidance set out minimises any additional burden on students beyond the existing assessment arrangements, such as mock exams, in place in centres?

Agree

Please add any comments to explain your response.

NGA agree that the proposed guidance minimises any additional burden on students beyond the existing assessment arrangements without undermining the validity and reliability of awarding grades.

Many students' mental health and their journey in education has been significantly impacted by the pandemic. NGA believe that the proposed guidance set out minimises potential for additional burden on students. Learning from previous years suggests that there needs to be an increased emphasis on the need for students to be aware of the arrangements with as much notice as possible. In event that exams and assessments cannot take place as planned in 2023, clear and consistent communication should be ensured in addition to the process of appeals under this arrangement.

Centres across the country have used TAGs as a method of awarding grades in previous years and much learning can be taken from these experiences. There is no doubt that an alteration in awarding grades can cause increased levels of stress and anxiety for students and therefore appropriate support measures need to be implemented to guide this cohort of students through the process.

NGA is particularly supportive of the section in the guidance which stipulates the importance of avoiding over assessment. This is particularly important to safeguard the wellbeing of students.

Question 3

To what extent do you agree or disagree that the guidance set out above would minimise any additional teacher workload beyond existing assessment arrangements, such as mock exams, in place in centres?

Agree

Please add any comments to explain your response.

In the event that exams are cancelled in 2023, teacher assessed grades enable students to be able to move forward with their education or move into employment. Where TAGs have been used in previous years many governing boards saw teachers overwhelmed with pressure and workload to ensure that grades were accurately awarded, pupils were supported in addition to continuing their teaching duties and delivering a curriculum.

In 2021, TAGs were used as a process in conjunction with the understanding that teachers will not have been able to have deliver a full curriculum and therefore only assessed on what they have learnt. The DfE and Ofqual should clarify the expectation on what the contingency arrangements would include in relation to the curriculum.

Findings from NGA's annual governance survey shows that 27% of governors and trustees envision TAGs to be a contributing factor that has a weighting towards and overall grade for students, however only 12% feel that TAGs should be the sole process of which is used to award grades. These figures demonstrate that despite there being a confidence behind TAGs, the implications associated with this method of awarding grades should not be solely done in this way.

To ensure that teachers are supported, NGA advocate the view that teachers and school leaders are provided with the correct training and support to ensure that grading is done fairly and quality assurances are put in place to allow for minimal disruption to students and teachers.

Question 4

Are there any parts of the guidance which you think could be improved? Please be specific about which part of the guidance you are referring to and how it might be improved.

The consultation/ guidance does not set out the metrics that would determine exams being cancelled. The pandemic is ever evolving and the metrics that determine contingency arrangements in 2023 will be no doubt different to the metrics used in 2021.

Question 5a

Should guidance remain in place beyond 2023 to support the award of grades should exams not be able to go ahead as planned for any reason in future years?

Many governors, trustees and governance professionals have communicated the impact that the pandemic have had on the education of pupils and highlight the impact that the pandemic will have on future cohorts due to disruption of previous learning. Guidance is a supportive tool that communicates the approach that all schools should take and enables consistency across the country. With this view in mind, guidance should remain in place where possible to support the awarding of grades should exams not be able to go ahead as planned for any reason.

Question 7

Please add any comments you have on the proposed approach, and/or any views you have on alternative approaches.

NGA has gathered the views of governors and trustees on the future of exams. The findings show that 27% of respondents with a view said that teacher assessed grades should contribute towards the awarding of grades from GCSE, AS and A level subjects. 25% felt that the awarding of grades should return to usual exams and assessments set by exam boards but with adaptations, 20% of respondents felt that awarding of grades should return to usual exams and assessments set by exam boards. 15% felt that different approaches to awarding grades should be taken and only 12% of respondents think that teacher assessed grades should be the process by which grades are awarded, similar to the process followed for Summer 2021 awarding of grades. These findings show that governors and trustees are open to using TAGs as a contributing factor that awards grades to students however, there is a slight mixture of views that TAGs should be the sole factor that awards grades.