



Predicted grades: A guide for schools

Predicted grades are an important landmark in the continued monitoring and assessment of student progress. However, it is not always an exact science; there can be challenges around providing and receiving predicted grades, for all involved. This guide aims to help teachers and school leaders to navigate the key principles for best practice in issuing predicted grades for formal qualifications.

What are predicted grades?

Predicted grades are subject-specific indicators of what grades a student is most likely to achieve in their upcoming formal qualifications. These grades are expected to be as helpful as possible in determining the most likely outcomes of a student's learning.

Why do we need predicted grades?

Predicted grades are most often used in the application process to further education. Colleges and universities can make informed decisions about their admissions based on the predicted grades of applicants. Predicted grades can also help to determine which subject courses a student can take in further education. Additionally, the predicted grades issued by schools are a clear indicator of a student's progress and attainment.

Who is involved in deciding predicted grades?

In the first instance, **teachers** are responsible for determining predicted grades before they are confirmed and issued to students and parents. Teachers and **heads of subject areas** then submit their predicted grade decisions to the **school leadership team** and the **administration staff** responsible for data management.

The **school leadership team** are responsible for facilitating a process of **standardisation**, making sure that predicted grades across all subjects are in line with relevant school data. With the help of the **school administration staff**, **school leaders** are required to check that predicted grades are not exceptionally high or low. Predicted grades should be justifiably comparable with the school results from previous years, as well as being in line with student target grades issued at the beginning of a course of study for the current cohort.

When should schools issue predicted grades?

Forward planning is key. Predicted grades can only be as reliable as the procedures that lead up to them.

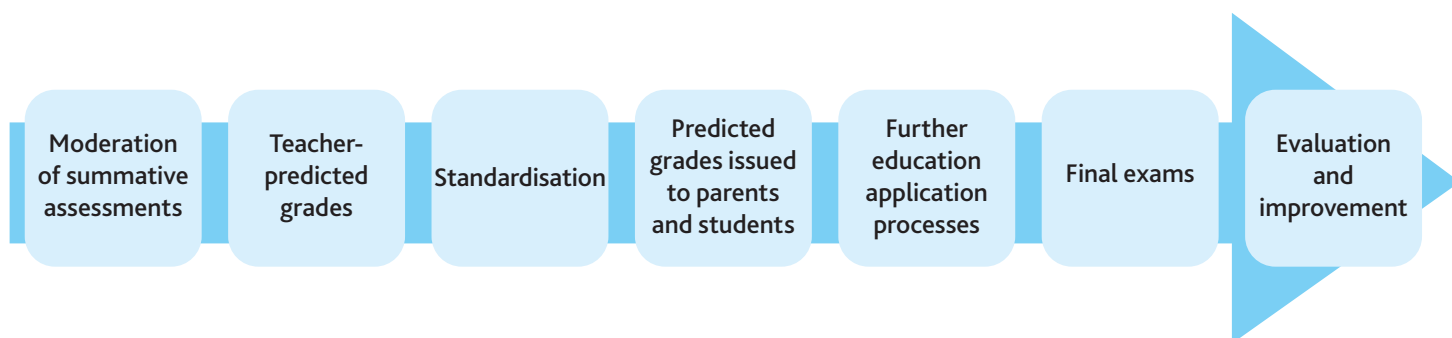
Colleges and universities will set their own formal deadlines for when they need to receive predicted grades. Schools need to plan backwards from these dates. Before predicted grades are issued to students and parents, time should be allowed for:

- Summative assessments to take place over the course of study. This might be across one, two or three years.
- Teachers to decide predicted grades according to the evidence and data they have collected over this time. This might take place across three to four weeks.
- Leaders and administrators to check and standardise predicted grades. This might take three to four weeks.

Once the above processes have been completed, students and parents will need to know the predicted grades in order to begin college and university application processes. Students' predicted grades will determine the courses and institutions they can apply for, depending on the admissions criteria.

- A further period of three to four weeks should be allowed here to address any potential issues with the predicted grades received by students and parents.





How are predicted grades decided?

Several processes play a key role in deciding predicted grades:

The long-term collection of summative assessment data

The reliability of predicted grades depends on the assessment data collected throughout the course of study. Therefore, all subject areas should implement opportunities for summative assessments to take place in order to collect enough data to inform predicted grades. Heads of subject areas should also make sure that summative assessments take place in exam conditions, including with access arrangements as appropriate. They should also make sure that teachers are confident in using assessment criteria and past-paper grade boundaries when awarding notional grades for those assessments.

For learners taking the staged route of AS Levels, their final AS grades will count as very helpful indicators of A Level predicted grades.

Standardisation

Throughout the course of study, a process of standardisation should take place for a selection of summative assessments, in order to check that assessments are being notionally graded accurately and fairly across different teachers. Standardisation processes are important to prevent awarding overly generous or overly severe marks. If standardisation takes place regularly throughout the course of study and in the long-term lead-up to predicting grades, the final standardisation process of predicted grades will be more straightforward.

Computer-generated data

Many schools install software to use as a centralised data system that generates predicted grades based on previous learner data, such as national test scores, assessment results, component marks or other external or internal data. Data software is not only helpful for record-keeping but also for immediate detection of patterns, anomalies and possible trajectories in the data profiles of individual learners or cohorts of current and previous years. Likewise, this same software can be used as a standardisation method across entire cohorts or categories of data within and compared with previous years. When using computer-generated predicted grades, it is vital that this is combined with the professional judgement of teachers.

Professional judgement

Teachers should use their professional judgement when awarding predicted grades, making sure that all predictions are based on the evidence and data of the ongoing attainment of each student. For predicted grades to be fairly determined for all students, there should be no bias or discrimination of any kind. Similarly, it is important that teachers are not put under unnecessary pressure by students, parents, management or leadership to raise predicted grades.

Predicted grades can be successfully derived by a balance of **quantitative** and **qualitative** data. Quantitative data will involve collecting raw marks, notional grades, test scores and percentages recorded over a period of long-term study. There will also be relevant qualitative data that personalises the most appropriate predicted grade to each individual learner. Qualitative data might include observation of a learner's work ethic and attributes, knowledge of pastoral factors or the provision of extra support.

The purpose of predicted grades in your school

It is important for schools to decide on a policy for predicted grades for decision-making factors to be consistent across the board. For example, the purpose might predominantly be to make predicted grades as **attainable** as possible. In this instance, predicted grades will be based on an average of test scores, or the most frequent notional grade achieved by a learner in their summative assessments. The main limitation with this process is the prospect of disadvantaging a learner in their application process to a college or university that requires a particular minimum predicted grade.

Alternatively, the school's purpose might be to equip learners with **aspirational** predicted grades. In this instance, judgements will include the predicted level of progress a learner is likely to make between the time of the decision and the final exams, even if they are not currently achieving that grade in their summative assessments. The purpose here is to help learners to apply for their next desired step in education. The limitation with this process is that if the predicted grades are not achieved in the final exams, then conditional offers from colleges or universities may need to be withdrawn.



Any agreed policy should still allow for individual cases to be refined accordingly. The attributes of individual learners should be considered in judgements around predicted grades, which might include an open dialogue between schools and families where needed. Some learners might find an attainable grade to be a motivational tool because the pressure to keep progressing along a timeline is removed. Conversely, other learners might find an aspirational grade to be highly motivating in their pursuit of a place on their desired course.

Colleges and universities cannot expect predicted grades to be an exact guarantee; students may achieve higher or lower grades when it comes to sitting their final qualifications. In these instances, colleges and universities allow time for adjustments and final admission decisions to be made, once examining bodies have awarded final qualifications. However, the more carefully judged the predicted grades are, the more likely they are to aid students through their transition into the next stage of their education.

Evaluation and improvement

No school can expect to achieve 100 per cent accuracy in the comparison between final grades and predicted grades. However, when final exam results are made available, this provides an opportunity to review and evaluate the school's predicted grades process. Asking questions about the characteristics of the data is an excellent way to inform and subsequently improve future practice.

For example:

- Are specific groups of learners noticeably under or over-predicted? If so, can we find out why?
- Which methods led to the most accurate predicted grades? Can these methods now be refined or made more consistent across the school?
- How can we obtain feedback from the learners themselves?

What is the difference between a predicted grade and a forecast grade?

Predicted and forecast grades are essentially the same thing, depending on the use to which they are put. As described in this guide, teachers decide on a predicted, or forecast, grade for each student. Thereafter, these grades are then used in two ways. Firstly, as predicted grades, they are frequently used in the application process for further education. Secondly, as forecast grades, Exams Officers in each school submit these to us, where they are then used as data or reference points in the following assessment and internal quality assurance processes:

- Deciding syllabus grade thresholds
- Adjusting marks if schools apply for special consideration on behalf of candidates
- Carrying out checks before we release results.

There is more information about our requirements for the submission of forecast grades, including how to submit them and by when, in the [Cambridge Handbook](#)

Conclusion

School leaders, teachers and administration staff are responsible for the timely and fair distribution of evidence-based predicted grades for all students who wish to apply for further education. Predicted grades occur towards the end of a course of study, before final college and university applications are processed and after the careful administering and data-collecting of regular summative assessments. So, forward planning is key. Predicted grades need to be diligently derived – as a result of long-term, forward planning – from before the start of any course of study.

Further reading

- **Child, S., & Ellis, P. (2021) *The What, Why and How of Assessment*. Corwin.**
A must-have guide to assessment, this publication is a professional resource for teachers and leaders, supporting them to develop their understanding of the key principles and purposes of assessment. It includes up-to-date classroom approaches and guidance for evaluation and monitoring, enabling schools to build confidence in their knowledge of assessment.
- **Gill, T., & Benton, T. (2015) *The accuracy of forecast grades for OCR A levels in June 2014*. Statistics Report Series No.90. Cambridge Assessment.**
An enlightening report on research conducted by the Research Division at Cambridge Assessment. The report examines the accuracy of forecasted (predicted) grades in relation to the final grades of learners: [Read more](#)
- **Cambridge University Press & Assessment Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring.**
The Centre for Evaluation and Monitoring offers research-based, baseline assessments that give teachers unprecedented access into what is happening in their classroom, their school and their profession. This enables schools to use data for monitoring progress, predicting exam performance and improving practice: [Read more](#)

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