T Levels: Guidance on grading for teachers

Heads of centre should ensure that students have the opportunity to show the full breadth of their knowledge and understanding in each T levels sub-component, based on what they have been taught. It is important that grades represent a holistic, objective judgement based on evidence of each student’s performance in each sub-component. Evidence should be used consistently across the class or cohort wherever possible. The evidence can be of different types and can come from across the course of study. This guidance should support the consideration of the different factors that need to be accounted for when making a judgement about the grade.

Centres should also refer to Ofqual’s guidance, Information for centres about making objective judgements in relation to awarding qualifications in 2021. Teachers are expected to have reviewed the grade descriptors and performance indicators provided by exam boards before grading students. The following stages may be helpful when making grading decisions.

Step 1: Consider what has been taught

Looking at the specification that has been taught to consider:

- what content has each individual been taught?
- what content has not been taught to this cohort because of the impact of the pandemic?
- has the content you have taught been covered deeply or superficially?
- The evidence used to make your judgement must only include the appropriate assessment of content that has been taught.

Step 2: Collect the evidence

Unlike other qualifications, there is no historical delivery for T Levels which can be used to inform the award.

Consider what evidence there is of student performance, potentially collected over the course of study.

Recommended evidence includes:

- Student work produced in response to assessment materials provided by the awarding organisation, including Sample or Additional Sample Assessment Materials (SAMs and ADSAMs), Topic Tests, or the amended Employer Set Project (both to be published by April 16)
- Student work produced in centre-devised tasks that reflect the specification, that follow the same format as awarding organisation materials and have been marked in a way that reflects awarding organisation mark schemes. This can include:
  - substantial class or homework (including work that took place during remote learning);
  - internal tests taken by students; and/or
  - mock exams taken over the course of study.
- Records of each student’s progress and performance over the course of study.
Assessments used might be produced by awarding organisations, publishers or they might be teacher-devised tasks.

It is not necessary for every aspect of the specification to be assessed to arrive at a grade. The aim is to include evidence that assesses the student’s ability across a reasonable range of subject content reflecting, where possible, all assessment objectives, as set out in qualification specifications. Consider whether the evidence available is sufficient to support the judgement that is being made. If not, what additional assessment might be needed? Could the assessment materials provided by the awarding organisations be used to supplement or help to confirm performance of previous assessments?

Ideally, the evidence used will be consistent across the class or cohort but that may not always be the case if a student has missed some teaching, or one or more assessments, for valid reasons. All students will have had slightly different learning experiences (for example, missing a few lessons). For most students, consistency in the use of evidence is expected, and a differentiated approach is not warranted. In cases where students have experienced significant disruption, however, some flexibility may be required. Each student must be made aware of the evidence that is going to be used and understand that the range of evidence used to determine a grade is not negotiable.

Although there is no minimum requirement of content that students must have been taught, Heads of centre will have to confirm that students have been taught an appropriate amount of content, in the interests of allowing them to move on successfully to the next stage of education or training.

**Retention of evidence**

It is important that, where possible, evidence on which a student’s grade is based, including copies of the student’s work and any mark records, is retained safely by the centre; it will be needed to:

- support the centre’s determination of students’ grades;
- the internal and external quality assurance processes; and
- the appeals process.

Scanned copies of handwritten evidence or other digital documentation will be acceptable. Centres must also retain any information relating to a student’s access arrangements, or personal circumstances affecting student performance, which might need to be taken into account during the process of determining a student’s grade. Centres should keep records of student evidence and a record of any discussions with students around the evidence on which grades will be based readily accessible so it can be found if a student wishes to appeal their grade.

If some evidence of students’ work is not available, the marks can still be used in determining the final grade. The evidence that is available can be considered by the awarding organisations if the student decides to appeal.
Step 3: Evaluate the quality of the evidence

Ofqual’s guidance document, on Information for heads of centre, heads of department and teachers on the submission of teacher assessed grades, gives guidance on how to balance the different sources of evidence when making a grading decision. In addition to that guidance, consideration should be given to the following:

- Coverage of assessment objectives;
- Coverage of content;
- Authenticity – is the evidence the student’s own work?
- Level of control – was it taken in timed conditions? Was there an opportunity for redrafting? Was it supervised?
- Marking – how much support was available when applying the mark scheme? What internal standardisation processes have been applied?

While there is no one type of evidence that takes precedence, evidence gathered in conditions that enable you to be confident about the authenticity of the students’ work will give you confidence in the overall holistic judgement. More recent evidence is likely to be more representative of student performance, although there may be exceptions.

Step 4: Establish whether the proposed range of evidence is appropriate for all students

Wherever possible the same range of evidence should be used for all students in a class or cohort, although there may be individual students for whom the proposed evidence is not appropriate. The rationale for any exceptions must be documented by the centre.

Each student must only be graded on their performance based on the subject content they have been taught. Before finalising grading decisions, teachers should satisfy themselves that each student has been taught the content in line with the proposed evidence, and judge if each student has been taught the content sufficiently. Students must be told what evidence is going to be used, so that they have the opportunity to raise any genuine and valid concerns. Student views must be recorded and appropriately taken into account, with reasons for final decisions documented.

Some students may have missed a section of teaching due to valid reasons such as bereavement or long-term illness, or it may be the case that reasonable adjustments or access arrangements weren’t in place for a particular assessment. Where such adjustments/arrangements weren’t in place, teachers must consider whether to either:

a. use the evidence when assigning a grade on the basis that it is the most appropriate evidence available, and disregarding it would disadvantage the student – if this is the case, the impact of the reasonable adjustment not being in place must be accounted for at stage 5 (see below), and the rationale recorded; or
b. use alternative evidence to replace assessments that are not appropriately representative of individual students’ performance and if so, document decisions appropriately.
Step 5: Assign a grade

Grading decisions made at class or cohort level will be subject to a school or college’s overall quality assurance processes.

Grades should be based on a holistic, objective judgement of the evidence of the students’ performance on the subject content they have been taught. Consider the quality of the work in relation to the assessment materials used as well as the grade descriptors and performance indicators available to help reach a final grade. These materials describe the performance standard to be applied in grading judgements this summer. This will help to ensure that there is a common basis to all teacher assessed grades. It should be no easier or more difficult for a student to achieve a grade this year based on their performance than in future years. Further information on the descriptors and performance indicators is provided in the next section.

Decisions about grades must not factor in the student’s potential. For example, if all the evidence collected for a student is of grade B and A standard, there would be no reason to consider providing that student any other grades. Further guidance on making holistic grading decisions is provided in the supporting document: Worked examples to assist teachers making grading decisions in T Levels sub-components in summer 2021.

Finally, teachers should reflect on their judgements. Refer to Ofqual’s guidance. Information for centres about making objective judgements in relation to awarding qualifications in 2021.

Additional points about grading:

- Students should be provided with a grade where they have demonstrated engagement with sufficient content, achieved credit across multiple elements of assessment and achieved credit across multiple assessment objectives. Where the evidence for a student does not support this, they should be graded as unclassified.
- Reasonable adjustments for disabled students and access arrangements should have been in place when evidence was generated. Where they were not, centres should consider using other evidence or take it into account when coming to their judgement. Where appropriate, this should include input from relevant specialist teachers and other professionals, and it must be appropriately recorded/documentated.
- Special consideration requests will not apply in the usual way this summer because students will not be taking their exams. However, where illness or other personal circumstances might have temporarily affected performance, for example in mock exams, centres should bear that in mind when making their judgements (see stage 4, above). Another opportunity may be made available to replace that evidence with another piece where there is a justified rationale and recorded for doing so.
- Note that teachers are not making grading decisions in isolation. Once grades have been assigned, centres’ internal quality assurance process will ensure that standards are appropriate prior to sign-off by the Head of Centre.
Using grade descriptors and performance indicators

Grade descriptors and performance indicators must be used to make holistic judgements about student performance. These will be made available to centres by 16 April.

The grade descriptors

Grade descriptors are general statements that give a high-level reflection of student performance characteristics. They are based on the assessment objectives for the relevant specification. Assessment objectives are found in the relevant subject specification.

Grade descriptors will be made available by April 16.

What grade descriptors exist?

Grade descriptors have been created for each T Level at sub-component level. They describe mid-grade performance.

Grade descriptors will be provided for Grades A, C and E.

The performance indicators

Each awarding organisation has created performance indicators for each specification. This will be made available by each awarding organisation by April 16. It should be familiar and reflect the specification that you have taught.

Using the descriptors and performance indicators

A holistic judgement about the grade will be made based on the evidence.

Using the grade descriptors

Grade descriptors will help identify how the range of evidence for a student aligns with the expected performance standards.

Review the evidence. Read through the grade descriptors. Match the student’s evidence to the suitable statements within the grade descriptors.

A student’s collection of evidence may contain characteristics from different grade descriptors. For example, a student may show characteristics of a Grade B in one area, and characteristics of a Grade D in another area. For assistance with making grading decisions in such situations, please refer to the guidance: Worked examples to assist teachers making grading decisions for T Levels sub-components in summer 2021.

These grade descriptors do not highlight performance characteristics for all grades. Teachers are free to provide teacher assessed grades from the whole range of grades available. For example, if a student’s performance is stronger than the grade descriptors for a grade A, you should consider awarding a grade A*. Similarly, if a student’s evidence securely matches the statements in a
specific grade (e.g. Grade E) and goes beyond aspects of the statements in some areas, but does not match the statements in the higher descriptor (e.g. Grade C), then the teacher can provide the intermediary grade (e.g. Grade D).

Using the performance indicators

You should compare the evidence you have collected against the performance indicators provided. The indicators will not cover all areas of the specification. You will need to apply the same standards illustrated in the performance indicators to other pieces of student evidence.

Reaching a grade judgement

Professional experience and judgment will form a key part of this process. Due consideration must be given to all the evidence collected for each student.

You should make a holistic judgement where evidence crosses grade descriptors, balancing coverage of differently graded work across the course of study and accounting for conditions in which evidence was collected.

The use of tracking data and predicted grades in reaching grading decisions

One source of data which is available to centres is tracking systems, that provide target grades or predicted grades based on assessment inputs and data modelling. As the policy direction is that the final grade is derived solely based on performances produced by learners, a grade derived based on a predicted trajectory or target grade is not permitted.

For example:

- if a learner is currently performing consistently at a grade B standard, they should be awarded a grade B; and
- if a learner’s tracking data shows improvement over the year, having produced grade C level work in the first half of the year, and grade B work thereafter, the learner should be awarded a grade B, even if a tracking system suggests that the candidate could potentially have achieved a grade A based on their trajectory.

Worked examples

Worked examples are available to assist grading decisions and can be found in the document *Worked Examples to assist teachers in making grading decisions for T Levels sub-components in summer 2021.*