

Cambridge Examinations: October/November 2021

23rd September 2021

These guidelines are intended to explain how the Cambridge exams are going to run in the October/November 2021 session. They are completely accurate at the time of writing but, as you will see as you read through it, there are still some uncertainties. The next review date is October 4th, and we will revise our guidelines after that review.

The way it works

In New Zealand, students are permitted to take exams – NCEA, Cambridge or IB – if we are in Level 1 or Level 2. **They are not permitted to take exams if we are at Level 3.** You may have heard that there is a provision for Year 12 and Year 13 students to be allowed into school for educational reasons, but this actually has some very tight restrictions, and exams are explicitly excluded as a reason for coming into school.

Cambridge has a system designed to deal with this problem. They have been managing complicated situations like this, all over the world, for 20 months now, and they have developed a number of ways to manage the situation:

1. Exams run as usual if schools are able to have students in to take exams.
2. If students cannot come into school, **all** exams are cancelled and students are given School Assessed Grades (SAGs). These are grades that the school generates for each subject on the basis of work the students have completed at school.
3. If we move to SAGs, all external Cambridge exams are cancelled, even if we move to Level 2 during the exams. It is an “all or nothing” approach. This is because Cambridge needs to ensure that they allocate marks consistently.
4. If students are able to sit most exams, but there are some papers that they cannot complete, schools can apply for ‘Special Consideration’ for those papers. This means that we say “no students were able to sit this paper because of Government restrictions”. Cambridge will then look at their mark in other papers for that subject, and they will assume that each student would have got the same mark for the paper they could not sit and give the student those marks.
5. If a student cannot sit any papers in a subject, they cannot get a grade for that subject.
6. We can move to SAGs at any point in the exam process, but this will mean that any exam papers that have been taken will not count, and all students will be given an SAG for all of their subjects.
7. All schools in a region must follow the same rules. Auckland can be treated separately to the rest of New Zealand if we are at different levels, but all Auckland Cambridge schools must have the same arrangements.

Examinations

We are doing everything we can to ensure that exams can run for our students. This is a position supported by all of the large Cambridge schools, as we believe this is the best and fairest way to assess young people.

This means that we have decided that we will continue to prepare students for exams, and that we expect them to run as usual, probably under Level 2 conditions. The Government will make an announcement on October 4th about whether Auckland will move to Level 2 on October 6th. We are hoping that this is the decision that will be made.

If we move to Level 2 on October 6th:

Paper 1 of **IGCSE Environmental Management** will **NOT** be taken by students. We have applied to the Ministry of Education for an exemption to allow students to take the exam, but we do not expect this to be successful. We will apply for 'Special Consideration' for Paper 1, and students will be given their Paper 2 mark for Paper 1. They will therefore receive a grade in exactly the same way as they would if they had completed all papers.

All other exams will go ahead as planned.

It is possible that the Government decides to keep us at Level 3 on October 4th. If this is the case, the Cambridge Principals will meet to review our decision about the exams. We may, at this point, either decide to move to SAGs or – more likely – continue to work towards exams, and decide to review on October 11th after the next Government announcement. If we do not move to Level 2 on October 6th, we would hope that we move to Level 2 on October 13th.

If we move to Level 2 on October 13th:

Paper 1 and Paper 2 of **IGCSE Environmental Management** will **NOT** be taken by students. We will apply again to the Ministry of Education for an exemption to allow students to take the exam, but we would not expect this to be successful. This means that students will **NOT** be given a grade for this subject as they have not completed any components for it, and will instead be asked to take it in June 2022. This is not what we wish to do, but as it is an IGCSE subject, we hope that the students will understand that there is still time to take it.

Paper 1 of **AS Level Environmental Management** will **NOT** be taken by students. We will apply for 'Special Consideration' for Paper 1, and students will be given a combination of their Paper 2 mark and their coursework mark for Paper 1. They will therefore receive a grade in exactly the same way as they would if they had completed all papers.

All other exams will go ahead as planned.

It is possible that the Government decides to move to Level 2 a few days later, at the start of Term 4 in State schools. So:

If we move to Level 2 on October 18th:

Paper 1 and Paper 2 of **IGCSE Environmental Management** will **NOT** be taken by students. We will apply again to the Ministry of Education for an exemption to allow students to take the exam, but we would not expect this to be successful. This means that students will **NOT** be given a grade for this subject as they have not completed any components for it, and will instead be asked to take it in June 2022. This is not what we wish to do, but as it is an IGCSE subject, we hope that the students will understand that there is still time to take it.

Paper 1 and Paper 2 of **AS Level Environmental Management** will **NOT** be taken by students. We will apply for 'Special Consideration' for Paper 1 and Paper 2, and students will be given their coursework mark for Paper 1 and 2. They will therefore receive a grade in exactly the same way as they would if they had completed all papers.

Paper 1 of IGCSE Physical Education will **NOT** be taken by students. We will apply for 'Special Consideration' for Paper 1, and students will be given their coursework mark for Paper 1. They will therefore receive a grade in exactly the same way as they would if they had completed all papers.

Papers 2 and 3 of AS Level Spanish will **NOT** be taken by students. We will apply for 'Special Consideration' for both papers, and students will be given their Speaking mark for both papers. They will therefore receive a grade in exactly the same way as they would if they had completed all papers.

All other exams will go ahead as planned.

If, on October 11th, the Government decides that we will be staying at Level 3 until October 18th or any date after that, the Principals will meet again and the decision will almost certainly be to move to SAGs.

We cannot guarantee that decision – we are learning to live with some uncertainty, unfortunately – but it is a decision in principle, and so is highly likely to happen. So:

If we move to Level 2 on any date after October 18th, there will be no examinations and all subjects will be assessed by SAGs (School Assessed Grades).

School Assessed Grades (SAGs)

These sound a lot more frightening than they are! It's actually a very simple way that Cambridge has devised to safeguard students' results at the same time as guaranteeing some fairness and consistency. They have been used multiple times across the world, and they work well.

Awarding Grades

The school awards a grade for each student in each subject they take. So Student A will receive a grade for every subject they take, just as they would normally do. The grades available are the same: A* - G for IGCSE; A – E for AS Level; A* - E for A Level. An “ungraded” can also be awarded.

The teacher will decide on the grade based on the best work the student has completed during the course of the year and in assessments in Terms 3 and 4. The grade has to be supported by a “portfolio” of three pieces of work, all assessed at broadly the same level as the examiners assess at. Each piece has to have taken at least one hour to complete, and the teacher has to be reasonably secure that each piece has been completed fairly. In other words, we have to be reasonably sure that it is “authentic”.

The final grade awarded will be moderated (checked) by other teachers and then by senior leaders. Ultimately, every single grade for every single syllabus has to be authorised by the Executive Principal. It’s a very thorough process!

There are no percentages awarded. This is not important, as the certificates awarded by Cambridge only ever have Grades on them. New Zealand is actually the only country in the world to have percentages, and these are simply rankings within Grades. They are not connected to the actual raw marks.

Please note: the grade is based on the work in the portfolio, which is the best work a student has completed and that we can be reasonably sure is authentic. This means that it is **very** unlikely that a student will receive a mark lower than they deserve.

Generating Evidence

If we move to SAGs, we will:

Run a full timetable in Weeks 1 and 2 of Term 4. Some of these lessons may involve completing assessments that can be used as parts of portfolios. The “one hour” rule does **not** mean that students have to spend one hour on a piece of work in **one** sitting. This will take place whatever level we are at, either online or in school.

Run an “assessment session” in Weeks 3 and 4 of Term 4. This will generate additional evidence for teachers, and the assessments will be similar in some ways to “mock” exams. Again, this will take place either in school or online.

Gather evidence from previous assessments that may include Mid-Year Exams, the recently-taken assessments, or any class work that meets the criteria established by Cambridge. This is done on an individual basis, which means that one student’s portfolio does not have to have the same work as another student’s. It’s all about ensuring the student is judged on their best authentic work.

Sending the Grades to Cambridge

By the middle of November, we will have completed the process in school, at which point we will send the grades to Cambridge. We will have gathered our evidence, and also written our detailed “rationales” to explain our processes. Cambridge may ask us for these as part of their audit, so we will complete this part very carefully indeed.

We will **NOT** be able to let students or parents know their SAGs at this stage. We are strictly forbidden from doing so. This is because Cambridge check all grades, measure them against past performance, and can ask for the portfolios to check the marks. They may then change marks if they feel they are inaccurate.

Grades will be published in January through Cambridge Direct as usual.

AS and A Levels: generating grades

If a student has a grade from an AS Level, and is taking an A Level this year in the same subject, and we are running SAGs, it is the school’s job to combine the AS Level grade with the work completed at A Level.

If a student is given an AS Level grade by the school this year, and sits an A Level next year in the usual way, it is Cambridge’s job to combine the AS Level grade with the A Level grade.

Alex Reed
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