



The Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP  
Secretary of State  
Department for Education  
Sanctuary Buildings  
Great Smith Street  
London, SW1P 3BT

15 April 2020

Dear Secretary of State,

**OFQUAL RESPONSE TO DIRECTION UNDER S 129(6) OF THE  
APPRENTICESHIPS, SKILLS, CHILDREN AND LEARNING ACT 2009**

Thank you for your letter of 31 March, setting out your direction to Ofqual in relation to the awarding of this year's A and AS levels and GCSEs, published on 3 April 2020.

We are fully committed to playing our part in responding to the profound challenges presented by COVID-19 in the interests of students and all those who use and rely on qualifications.

Your letter acknowledges the very significant implications this current health crisis has for students, teachers, schools and colleges – in particular the government's decision to close schools and colleges to all except the children of critical workers and vulnerable children and that exams will not take place this summer.

In response to these exceptional circumstances and having due regard to government policy, we have initiated extraordinary measures to secure results for students that will enable them to progress in their education or career. We want this process to be as fair as is possible, and to be manageable for schools and colleges, who will play a critical role – using their professional judgement to assess the likely attainment and rank order of their students. Informed by consultation with school and college leaders, teacher unions, higher education institutes, exam boards and student representative bodies we have published information for heads of centres, heads of departments and teachers setting out the process to produce both centre assessment grades and rank ordering of candidates.

We note your direction that we should adopt an approach to standardise those assessment grades across centres. In line with our statutory objectives, it is vital to adopt an approach that is consistent, fair and maintains standards as far as is possible. We are therefore launching today a consultation that, among other things, seeks views on the principles that we propose should underpin the approach we take to the standardisation of centre assessment grades. The outcomes of our consultation will inform the choices we make, as we have due regard to your direction that, as far as is possible, standards should be maintained and the distribution of grades follows a similar pattern to that in previous years.

It is important that students have the means to question whether they have been issued with the correct grade. You have directed us to develop and implement an appeal process, focussing on whether the process used to issue results was correctly applied and used the correct data, rather than seeking to overturn teachers' professional judgement on individual students' ability. Our consultation today sets out proposals for how we propose such an appeal process should operate.

In relation to an opportunity for students to sit exams as soon as reasonably possible when schools and colleges re-open, we are engaging with exam boards, the Department for Education and representative bodies from across the sector to consider the optimal arrangements for this.

The cumulative effect of these steps represents a significant change to the usual operation of GCSEs, AS and A levels and so will require amendments to our regulatory framework. Our consultation today sets out our intentions for all interested parties to comment on, alongside both an equalities impact assessment and a regulatory impact assessment.

All those students, parents, teachers and others affected by these unprecedented circumstances can be assured that we will continue to work urgently, with stakeholders and representative bodies across the sector and officials in the Department for Education, to put in place the best possible arrangements on their behalf.

I am copying this letter to the recipients of yours: Robert Halfon MP as chair of the Education Select Committee; to Kirsty Williams AM and Peter Weir MLA as Education Ministers in Wales and Northern Ireland respectively; and to John Swinney MSP as Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills in the Scottish Government.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish underneath the name.

**Sally Collier**  
Chief Regulator