



27 July 2020

Dear Head of centre,

With a challenging term behind you, I hope you and your staff are able to enjoy something of a break before this summer's qualification results are published. It is thanks in no small part to your hard work and professionalism in delivering this year's exceptional arrangements that the vast majority of students will receive calculated grades to enable them to progress to further study or employment, despite the cancellation of exams.

### **GCSEs, AS and A levels: what's happening now?**

Now that the deadline has passed for you to submit your centre assessment grades and rank order information, exam boards are working to standardise grades to ensure consistency of judgements between different schools and colleges, using the statistical standardisation model we have developed with them.

The model provides the critical tool we will use to maintain standards, both between centres and over time. We have extensively tested different approaches and have selected the one which gives students the fairest and most accurate results possible. You and your students can be reassured that at a national level we expect results to be broadly in line with those in previous years. However, as we have taken technical decisions about the operation of the model, we have prioritised fairness for students over precise statistical alignment where appropriate. This will mean this year's results will be slightly higher than last year's, although we will make sure there is not any significant change in year on year results which would undermine the currency of the qualifications for progression.

As you know, because of the speed at which these arrangements had to be put in place, you were not given an opportunity to develop a common approach to grading. Therefore, it is to be expected that all centres will see some adjustments to their centre assessment grades to bring them into line with other schools and colleges; and a substantial number of students will have at least one grade that has been adjusted as a result of standardisation.

Any adjustments made as a result of standardisation will be precisely determined by exam boards for each subject in each school and college, and will be based on evidence. Such adjustments mean universities, colleges and employers can be confident this year's results carry the same currency and your students can compete fairly for opportunities with students from previous and future years.

We have published a [short film and factsheet which give full details about the statistical model](#) used so that you, your students and their parents or carers, can understand how GCSE, AS and A level grades will be standardised this summer. It is important that the arrangements this year are fully transparent. Therefore, we will publish the precise details of the model used on results days – to do so any earlier would allow some centres to try to work out their results before they are released nationally and it is important all students get their results at the same time. Nonetheless, the detail you will find at the link above sets out the approach we will use.

## **Vocational and technical qualifications**

Because vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) come in a range of shapes and sizes, and fulfil a range of purposes, they are not all being treated in the same way. But in all cases, exam boards and awarding organisations have made arrangements to ensure this year's results carry the same currency and students can compete on a level playing field for opportunities with students from previous and future years. The vast majority of VTQs used for entry to further or higher education (in particular those taken alongside or instead of GCSEs, AS and A levels) will receive a calculated result.

For some qualifications, calculated results are not appropriate. In general, assessments will be required for qualifications that are used to signal occupational competence; are about having the skills required for the job; or that could have professional or health and safety implications. This includes some qualifications taken by students intending to progress to higher education. Awarding organisations have considered how assessments for these types of qualifications can be adapted, including what adaptations are suitable and practicable under the current public health restrictions.

Where there is no way of calculating a result or adapting an assessment in a way that does not undermine its reliability, a delay to the assessment of some qualifications is unfortunately inevitable.

If there was not sufficient evidence for you to assign a student a CAG, or you have other reason to believe that they will not receive a result, then you should let them know as soon as possible.

We will be publishing an update to our VTQ Guide to Centres in the coming days.

## **Sharing centre assessment grades - subject access requests**

It is important you do not share centre assessment grades, nor rank orders, with students or parents and carers prior to results days. This is to protect the integrity of the grading process, and to avoid you and your staff being put under pressure. Since the final grades for some or all students in a centre could be different from those submitted, it also helps to manage students' expectations. Please bear in mind that any inappropriate disclosure of centre assessment grades and / or rank order information before results days will be investigated by exam boards as potential malpractice.

If you receive subject access requests for centre assessment grades and / or rank order information, before results day, the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has confirmed that the exemption under Schedule 2, paragraph 25 of the Data Protection Act 2018 will apply. This means that you do not need to provide the centre assessment grades or rank orders to students until after the results have been published. More information can be found on the [ICO website](#).

After results are issued, and subject to data protection and any other relevant legal considerations, you may provide this information.

Where centre assessment grades and / or rank order information is given to students, we encourage you to consider what additional information and guidance is provided, so that students understand the context in which their final calculated result has been decided. Subject access requests received after results day should be processed in the usual manner.

Guidance on these issues has also been published by the [Confederation of School Trusts](#) and [ASCL](#).

## **Appeals**

You may appeal to the exam board if you believe there has been an error in how the process has been applied to a student's grade. We expect that any mistakes will be quickly found and corrected.

We know many students would have liked an opportunity to challenge their centre assessment grades and position in the rank order. On balance, we decided this would not be in the interests of students or the fairness of the arrangements overall. Any appeal would have to be undertaken by someone better placed than the student's teachers to judge their likely grade if exams had taken place – in the unique circumstances of this summer, we do not believe there is any such person.

If students or others have concerns about bias or discrimination they should normally raise these concerns with you, their centre, in the first instance. Where there is evidence, we require exam boards to investigate allegations as potential malpractice or maladministration. We expect such allegations to be rare, but this is an important safeguard for students and their overall confidence in this year's grading arrangements.

We are finalising our guidance for the exam boards on appeals. We will include guidance on when an exam board might decide, following an appeal, that a school's or college's performance in a previous year, or years, might not be good evidence of the likely performance of students this year and so it should be set aside in favour of more relevant data.

We know that some schools and colleges would wish to appeal on the basis that incremental improvements seen over recent years would have continued, in other words that because its 2019 results were better than its 2018 results, its 2020 results would have been better still. We carefully considered this in our consultation but the research evidence did not support appeals on this basis.

We will publish the final guidance shortly, giving examples of the types of circumstance that might lead to a successful appeal.

Due to the diversity of arrangements for vocational and technical qualifications, arrangements for appeals may differ across qualifications. The relevant awarding organisation will be able to advise on the appeals process in place.

## **Progression – centres with post-16 provision**

Where you offer courses to students post-16, whilst the grades students receive this year will continue to be integral to your admissions decisions, you may wish to consider the approach you take for certain students, given they did not have the opportunity to sit exams and other assessments. In particular, you may wish to consider whether you can offer greater flexibility in your admissions decisions than you would in any other year, to allow students to progress to the courses you offer. For example, if a student has missed one grade, you may want to consider the profile of their grades and put slightly less weight on the one or two lower grades. Or you may wish to consider giving slightly more weight than usual to other robust evidence in admissions decisions, for example if you already know a student and their potential well or can determine this from speaking to their previous school or college.

You may also wish to consider what other evidence could be assessed to allow progression for private candidates who could not receive a calculated grade, or students who could not be provided with a VTQ result because there was no way in which a valid result could be issued.

## Autumn exams

We have confirmed that exam boards will offer the full suite of GCSE, AS and A level exams this autumn, for any student unable to receive a calculated grade or who would like an opportunity to improve their result. JCQ have confirmed the following timetable for exams:

- AS and A level exams start on Monday 5 October and finish on Friday 23 October (entry deadline 4 September)
- GCSE exams start on Monday 2 November and finish on Monday 23 November (entry deadline for all subjects except English and maths 18 September; entry deadline for English and maths 4 October)

We understand the logistical challenges schools and colleges will face in the autumn – we will continue to work across the sector and the Department for Education is exploring further ways to minimise the additional burdens.

For vocational and technical qualifications, students who would like to improve their grade or have not received a result may wish to consider taking an assessment at the next available assessment opportunity. The relevant awarding organisation will be able to advise on when the next assessment opportunity will be, and we will be collating information in an updated version of our [summer 2020 explainer app](#).

## Resources

We appreciate that you, your staff, students, parents and carers may have questions about the arrangements for awarding results this summer. With such exceptional circumstances this year, we want to help you in communicating with students, and their parents and carers, about the arrangements in place. So, we have published a range of resources on our website, including a [Student Guide, e-posters and postcards](#), which we will also send out in hard copy. You might want to send some of these resources to students, and parents and carers to support their understanding.

If students, or their parents or carers, want more information on appeals or complaints, or what their next steps may be once they've received their results, they can contact the National Careers Service Exam Results Helpline on 0800 100 900 and speak to a professionally qualified careers adviser. For further information they can also contact Ofqual directly via our helpline on 0300 303 3344, or by email at [public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk).

We also have a range of information available on our [website](#) if you would like more details about the arrangements for awarding qualifications this summer.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank you again for all the work that you, and your staff, have put in during such challenging circumstances, and to thank you in anticipation for all you will do over the coming months to support and guide students through results days, the autumn series and beyond.

Yours sincerely,

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

**Sally Collier**  
Chief Regulator, Ofqual