



For the attention of the Director of Admissions
By email

7 August 2020

Dear Colleague,

Information on A levels and other qualifications in England this summer

As you will know, we have put in place exceptional arrangements for A levels and other qualifications this summer because exams were cancelled. In the main, this should not affect your admissions this year. Overall outcomes in A levels across all grades will be broadly similar to those of previous years and you can be confident that the grades will reflect students' abilities.

I am writing to you to:

- ensure all those dealing with admissions applications have the information they need to understand the arrangements in place for qualifications this year;
- ask you to hold open places for students whose results you know are subject to an appeal until the UCAS agreed date of 7 September wherever possible; and
- ask you, wherever possible, to be as flexible as you can towards students who might have missed out on their offer, for example by using contextual information.

The regulators in Northern Ireland and Wales have used similar arrangements to those we have used in England. However, I am writing about the arrangements for students in England only. Students will receive calculated grades this year, based on centre assessment grades and rank order information submitted to the exam boards by their school or college. Exam boards have standardised these grades using a model developed with Ofqual to make sure standards are aligned between all centres.

The grades awarded for most subjects are broadly in line with those of previous years. We are likely to see a small increase in the proportion of A or A* grades, but the proportion of B and C grades is relatively stable, and there are slightly fewer Ds and Es. These small changes reflect decisions we have taken in the design of the statistical standardisation process to make sure the arrangements operate in the fairest possible way. Had we not standardised the centre assessment grades provided by schools and colleges, the increase would have been around 12 percentage points across all subjects at grades A* and A. This would have created

unfairness between different schools and colleges who took different approaches to determining their centre assessment grades and would likely have created considerable admission problems for some institutions.

However, for some subjects with low entries, or where a higher proportion of centres have small cohorts of students, we are likely to see larger increases in the proportion of higher grades awarded. This is because the statistical model would have been less reliable where a centre's cohort was very small and so we have placed more reliance on the centre assessment grades.

We tested our approach to standardising students' grades extensively to ensure it would not advantage or disadvantage particular groups of students over others. We are reassured that our preliminary analysis of the data shows no widening of the attainment gap between students according to their backgrounds.

Inevitably some students will be disappointed with their grades. Their disappointment will naturally feel more acute than in a normal year as students were not able to show what they could achieve by taking their exams. We will be ready to support students through our own helpline. The usual Exam Results Helpline will also be available. However, your admissions colleagues might expect to hear from especially disappointed students this year. They will be better able to deal with such students if they understand the context in which grades were awarded and the arrangements for appeals this year.

Schools and colleges can appeal their results where they have evidence that the standardisation model did not produce reliable results for their students. We are, of course, in uncharted territory so we do not know how many centres might appeal. We warmly welcome the decision by UCAS to move to 7 September the advisory date for institutions to hold open students' places where they know that they are subject to an appeal. We ask you to do all you can to facilitate this where possible. We expect exam boards to prioritise, as usual, appeals that affect students' immediate progression.

For most other level 3 qualifications designed primarily for entry to higher education, such as BTECs, students will also receive a calculated grade. We expect that where entry to these qualifications was similar to previous years, results will be broadly stable too. Unlike for A levels, awarding organisations have put in place their own approaches to calculating grades depending on the evidence available and the nature and structure of their qualifications. In some qualifications, many learners had already taken assessments and banked component grades before centres were closed and this will have naturally contributed to the overall qualification grade. In some qualifications, and for some learners, where practical skills need to be tested, students may have completed adapted assessments instead. For some qualifications, there may be students intending to progress to higher education who may have had their assessments delayed where there was insufficient evidence to support calculation of grades, or adapting assessment was not possible.

While many home educated and re-sitting students will receive grades this summer, some were not able to receive a calculated grade. We would ask you to consider whether you can make special provision for such students whose opportunities to progress might otherwise be delayed. Such students will be able to enter for an additional exam series in the autumn, along with those who wish to improve their calculated grade.

We have published on our website full details of the arrangements this summer. [This link](#) will take you to the range information we have put in place for students about this year's results which you may find useful, and we have provided [a short film and factsheet](#) about the arrangements for standardising grades we have put in place this year.

The arrangements we have put in place mean students' grades can be relied upon. I am sure you will share our wish to see as many young people as possible move forward with their lives after a difficult and unsettling period. You will have your own admissions priorities. However, given the exceptional way in which grades have been awarded this year we hope you will be flexible where you can towards students who might have missed out on their offer, for example by using contextual information.

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 extending to the right.

Sally Collier
Chief Regulator