



Michelle Donelan MP
Minister of State for Universities

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10th August 2020

Dear colleagues,

This year the Government made the difficult decision, in light of the unprecedented public health emergency, to cancel all exams due to take place in schools and colleges in England this summer. Since then, Ofqual has worked hard to develop a system that would provide grades to students, so that they could progress on to the next stage of their education or career.

The results that young people receive this year and will carry forward with them, will be valid and hold the same value as those from previous and future years. However, the best method for judging students' performance is exams and assessments, and there will be some students who might reasonably believe that they would have got a better grade if they had sat their exams, but would like to progress before the autumn exam series.

I therefore welcome the appeals process that Ofqual confirmed on Thursday. This will ensure, in circumstances where students' achievements have not been fairly reflected, that their school or college can appeal to have their grade reassessed. We anticipate that this group will include in particular some students who are highly talented in schools or colleges that have not in the past had strong results. We expect the vast majority of grades to be accurate, but it is essential that we have this safety net for young people who may otherwise be held back from moving on to their chosen route. **That is why I have decided to exempt certain students going through this process from the student number control. This will apply to students whose grades are subject to an appeal, where that appeal is successful, the student's grades are increased, and they then meet conditions of the student's offer. This exemption is limited to these circumstances only.**

I have been assured that the appeals process will happen as quickly as possible and exam boards will prioritise cases that affect students' progression, so that HE providers can take quick decisions on admissions.

I am writing to you to ask that you play your part in helping the young people affected by the events of this summer. I ask that you extend some flexibility in your admissions decisions this year, wherever you can, to assist young people in moving on to their next steps. Where you are aware that a student's grade may change as the result of an appeal, I would encourage you, where possible, to hold

their place until they receive the result of that appeal. I strongly welcome UCAS's decision to extend the 31 August advisory deadline for applicants to meet academic offer conditions to 7 September and I know that the exam boards are committed to doing all that is possible to resolve appeals for affected candidates by that date. For all other candidates, the exam boards will aim to respond within 42 calendar days, and earlier wherever possible.

Separate to the formal appeals process, you will also be in the best position to take a holistic view, using a wider range of evidence, of an individual's capability - working with their school or college. If as a result of this, you have reason to believe that they will be able to benefit from moving on to your institution, I would encourage you to allow them to do so.

I am sure you will agree that it is important that we all take responsibility to do what we can to ensure that young people are not disadvantaged by the unique circumstances this year. I should be grateful therefore for your support in enabling students to progress wherever possible.

The Chief Regulator has also written to admissions officers to explain the process for arriving at calculated grades and has provided more detail on the situation this year.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Michelle Donelan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline.

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