



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

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Message to all head teachers and college principals

I am writing to you about this year's A and AS level and GCSEs results, as I am aware that many schools and colleges have concerns about how the A and AS level results released this week were arrived at and the impact on your students.

I wanted to assure you first that the grades students have received are based on the judgement of their school or college, and have been moderated by exam boards to make sure the same standard is applied to all students. I am confident that the results are fair for the vast majority of students, but that some will feel that they could have done better. That is why we have introduced a triple lock to give students an added safety net. Students will be able to accept their calculated grade, appeal on the basis of a valid mock result or sit an exam in the autumn. There is no perfect replacement for exams, but this approach ensures fairness for young people so that they can progress to the next stage of their lives.

Despite the unprecedented circumstances, grades have remained broadly stable with a 2.5 percentage point rise in As and A*s at A level. A record number of 18 year olds have been accepted into university, including a record number from the most disadvantaged backgrounds – up 7.3% from last year.

I realise, however, that there will be cases where schools and colleges feel that the results their student have received are not fair. Whilst the arrangements in place this summer are the fairest possible in the absence of exams, any process for calculating grades will inevitably produce some results which need to be queried. For that reason, the Government has been clear since the decision was taken to cancel exams that we must have a robust appeals process in place to allow any anomalies to be addressed, so that we can be confident that students can ultimately get the grades they deserve. [Ofqual announced the details of the appeals process on 6 August](#) and has also [published a guide for students on appeals](#).

I understand, however, that many schools and colleges are unclear about what the rules for appeals are and how to go about appealing. The [process for appeals is set out in JCQ guidance](#) and this too will be updated shortly. All appeals must start by contacting the relevant exam board. The detail for how

to do this is can be found in Appendix A on page 9 of the JCQ appeals guidance but in brief the arrangements for each board are:

- AQA – download the Standardisation Report for the subject you want to appeal in (this can be found on e-AQA), click on the subject-specific link at the bottom of the report and complete the webform.
- OCR – use the [OCR Interchange](#)
- Pearson – use [Edexcel Online](#)
- WJEC – use [WJEC's secure website](#)

As with request for reviews of marking or moderation in a normal year, appeals must be submitted by the school or college, rather than by individual students or their families. The deadline for submission is 17 September. Any queries on the appeals process should be directed to the relevant exam board's Customer Services Team.

In terms of the grounds for appeal, schools and colleges may appeal in the following circumstances:

- If they believe something has gone wrong in processing their results – for example, if they believe they have made an error when submitting information on their students; or similarly, that the exam board made a mistake when calculating, assigning or communicating a grade. We expect that any such mistakes will be quickly found and corrected. It is important to state that where the rank ordering has been disrupted, this constitutes a data error and will be corrected. Don't hesitate to contact your Board in this event.
- If they can provide evidence that grades are lower than expected because previous cohorts of students taking that subject in the school or college (whose results have been taken into account in the standardisation model) are not sufficiently representative of this year's students. Examples of this might be:
 - if a single-sex school has changed to co-educational
 - if the school or college has had a significant change in leadership or governance and can provide objective evidence that its previous grades are not a reliable indicator of its 2020 results
 - where the school or college experienced a monumental event (for example flooding or fire which meant students had to re-locate) which affected one year's results in the historical data used in the

model, but would not have impact on this year's students

- where – because of the ability profile of the students – the school or college was expecting results this year to show a very different pattern of grades from results in previous years. That could include where the grades of unusually high or low ability students have been affected by the model because they fall outside the pattern of results in the school or college in recent years
- or where the profile of grades awarded is significantly below the profile awarded in recent years and this cannot be explained by changes in the ability profile of the students.
- In these cases, evidence will need to be submitted to the exam board which will consider the strength of the case put forward before reaching a decision. The exam boards have provided information to each school or college alongside its results setting out which data was used in the model, to help you to understand how your students' grades were calculated. If you are unclear about what kind of evidence you should put forward, you should talk to your exam board.
- It has been brought to my attention that certain large or young centres and their students have been affected by some of the scenarios set out here. The Boards and Ofqual have assured me that such Centres will qualify for urgent attention.
- Finally, where a student has a valid mock result which is higher than the grade they have been awarded and wishes to have their mock result stand instead. Ofqual has issued [criteria on what constitutes a valid mock result](#) and where schools or colleges provide the necessary declaration we expect such appeals to be dealt with very quickly.

I know that many of your students will be anxious about what the need for an appeal will mean for them if they have a place at university or college which is dependent on the outcome of the appeal. I want to assure you that the Department has been working with the higher and further education sectors over recent months to ensure that they understand the need for flexibility, and the Ofqual Chief Regulator has written directly to all providers to make the same point. The Minister for Universities has also written directly to university Vice Chancellors to reinforce this message, and in particular to ask universities wherever possible to hold open places for any students who are dependent on the outcome of an appeal in order to meet the terms of their offer. Where a student's university place is dependent on the appeals process, exam boards are committed to doing all that is possible to resolve appeals by 7 September – which is UCAS' advisory deadline for applicants to meet academic offer conditions.

Finally, I wanted to let you know that given the extraordinary circumstances this year, we have decided that all appeals will be free. It is crucial that there are no financial barriers between students and the grades they have worked hard for, and that their schools and colleges should not have to foot the bill for any appeals that are necessary in order to ensure that students receive those grades.

The exam boards will still invoice schools and colleges for unsuccessful appeals as in a normal year, but the Department will reimburse the cost. Further details of how to claim will be made available in early September.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yours sincerely Nick". The signature is written in a cursive style.

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