



Rt Hon Robert Halfon MP  
Chair, Education Select Committee  
House of Commons  
London  
SW1A 0AA

6 August 2020

Dear Mr Halfon,

Ahead of our full response to your Committee's report *Getting the grades they've earned Covid-19: the cancellation of exams and 'calculated' grades*, which we will send in September after this year's results are issued, I am writing to update you on progress towards the release of results for GCSEs, AS and A levels, vocational, technical and other general qualifications.

### **Transparency**

We published on 21 July [a package of information](#) setting out how results are being produced this year and early indications of how the overall results are likely to look.

We also presented this information at our virtual summer symposium on the same day attended by some 150 people from a range of organisations across the sector, during which we took the opportunity to thank teachers for their hard work and professionalism in making this year's exceptional arrangements work.

We understand and agree with your Committee's calls for transparency about the statistical standardisation model used for GCSEs, AS and A levels. We explained, following consultation, the principles that would underpin the model and as soon as we were able following finalisation of the model provided [additional details](#) about how it works so that everyone with an interest in this year's arrangements can understand the approach that has been taken. We do not believe it would be appropriate to publish the complete statistical methodology until A level results days because this might lead to disclosure of results ahead of time, or result in students believing incorrectly they know what their results are ahead of time.

We were able to provide assurance at our symposium that national results will be similar to last year – in line with the Secretary of State’s [Direction](#) to us that, as far as is possible, qualification standards are maintained. The results will be slightly higher than last year because, where there was an option, we decided when finalising the model to err on the side of leniency, in favour of students. For example, historical data used in the model is based on previous years’ results after any reviews of marking or appeals. We anticipate an average increase of approximately 2% at A level and around 1% at GCSE when compared with 2019 results. Our analysis shows that the vast majority of final calculated grades will be either the same or no more than one grade different from centre assessment grades, showing the care and professionalism exercised by teachers. Understandably, overall schools and colleges have been more generous in their centre assessment grades than would be indicated by prior performance. Through the standardisation model we will ensure that the value of GCSEs, AS and A level grades is protected.

Along with the Committee and others we have been particularly concerned to ensure the arrangements for results this year do not exacerbate the attainment gaps between different groups of students seen in a normal year when exams have taken place. We were pleased to be able to confirm on 21 July that our initial analyses of GCSE, AS and A level outcomes is reassuring and suggests there will generally be no widening of the gaps in attainment between different groups of students. We published information about this [here](#).

Unlike GCSEs, AS and A levels, there is no overarching statistical standardisation model for vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications. To cater for the breadth of the VTQ landscape, we have designed our [extraordinary regulatory framework](#) to allow awarding organisations flexibility to determine the most suitable approach for their qualifications. This has been operationalised by 147 awarding organisations for just over 15,000 qualifications. In all cases, awarding organisations are responsible for designing assessment models, within the framework of our rules that allow assessments to be made in the most fair and valid way for the qualification type.

Different approaches to calculating results have been taken depending on the evidence available and the nature and structure of a qualification.

Whichever approach taken, awarding organisations have:

- gathered evidence such as previously banked assessment results, centre assessment grades and school/college results from previous years
- quality-assured the evidence that is to be relied upon
- ensured the outcomes are not out of line with expectations

We have engaged directly with awarding organisations, and facilitated consistency where possible through working groups focusing on approaches to calculated grades for sector areas or qualification types (for example Functional Skills, Applied Generals). Using a risk-based

approach, we have monitored awarding organisations particularly closely for over 1000 qualifications with the highest stakes and highest volume uptake. We anticipate that where the entry has remained similar, outcomes should remain broadly in line with previous years.

As we explained at our appearance, we are committed to evaluating this year's arrangements and will be publishing further information alongside and after results are issued.

### **Information for students**

As part of our commitment to support students during this difficult year, we published a [guide for students](#) on 27 July. We are providing full training for colleagues who will staff our helpline to take calls in the run up to, on and after results days. We are also supporting the preparation of the careers advisers who will staff the government's national Exam Results Helpline. This will provide greater capacity to respond to queries from students and their parents or carers as advisors will receive the detailed briefing information and training received by Ofqual staff. The Ofqual helpline is charged at standard network rate and the Exam Results Helpline is a freephone number.

Today, we have published a [student guide to appeals and malpractice or maladministration complaints](#). This includes information for those with complaints about bias, discrimination or another factor that suggests their school or college did not behave with care or integrity when determining their centre assessment grade or rank order information. We have provided this information to help students understand whether they might have a reason to make a complaint about malpractice or maladministration, including if they have concerns about bias or discrimination. The document includes examples to help students consider whether they might have evidence. As well as contacting our helpline or that provided by the Exam Results Helpline to discuss these issues, students could also choose to contact the Equality Advisory Support Service for advice if they think they have evidence of discrimination. We have provided these contact details in the student guide.

Alongside this information, we have also published [our final statutory guidance for exam boards on appeal arrangements for GCSE, AS and A levels this summer](#). This guidance confirms the grounds for appeal set out in our consultation proposals and following consultation provides additional examples of the circumstances in which appeals might apply.

Your report also calls for publication of the timetable for the Autumn series. JCQ has confirmed that

- AS and A level exams will start on Monday 5 October and finish on Friday 23 October (entry deadline 4 September) and results will be provided by Christmas
- GCSE exams will 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) and results will be provided by February.

For vocational and technical qualifications and other general qualifications, we require awarding organisations that normally provide an autumn assessment opportunity to take all reasonable steps to continue to provide this.

Where awarding organisations do not normally offer an autumn assessment opportunity, we have asked them to do so where there are students who need one, unless it would be impractical or create a disproportionate burden. We expect awarding organisations to work with centres, and to take decisions in the best interests of students. We have safeguards in place for us to intervene if we decide there is a particular need for an assessment that is not being met by awarding organisations. We also require awarding organisations to ensure that their approach to delivering these assessments minimises burdens and is as deliverable as possible, including by centres and teachers.

We are updating our [interactive tool](#) to include information about when the next available assessment opportunity will be for particular qualifications. The updated version will be available for use by centres, students, parents and all other interested parties by 7 August 2020.

Our consultation on proposed GCSE, AS and A levels exam and assessment arrangements in 2021 attracted almost 29,000 responses. On 3 August, we [published](#) a summary of the responses and our decisions for each subject.

We also published a [consultation](#) on assessment of VTQs in 2020/21 on 3 August. Our proposals include a requirement for awarding organisations to consider whether they should make adaptations to their assessments and qualifications to mitigate the impact of disruptions to teaching, learning and assessment. We will engage with awarding organisations during August on approaches for 2021 for different types of VTQs, and we anticipate publishing a further consultation later in the month.

I trust this information provides you with assurance that we take seriously your recommendations and have made considerable progress in responding to many of them. We will provide a full response to all your recommendations in September.

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.

**Sally Collier**  
Chief Regulator