

I have home educated my youngest son through all of his education. He is now 14 and would have sat his first GCSEs/International GCSEs this summer. The plan being to do 10 spread over 3 years.

When exams this summer were cancelled, we agreed almost immediately to defer his exams. He struggles with anxiety so waiting to find out what would happen for home educated children would be too stressful, particularly as we were lead to believe that his age ruled it out.

He studied one subject via a distance learning provider and the other by attending tutorials at our local exam centre (this was complicated because I was the group tutor). Our exam centre worked incredibly hard to grade students and I assisted with a couple of subjects. If information had been given to us sooner then we may have been able to make a different decision and get a grade.

Besides home educating my own son and tutoring at our exam centre I am admin for a Facebook group supporting home educators through the exams process. The overwhelming feeling that comes through from the last few months is home educators were forgotten and the issues faced by them not really understood.

The biggest problem has been a lack of communication. Exam centres were given little guidance and what little they were given was often too late. This led to a very confused picture with students who may have been able to get grades being withdrawn.

My concern is going forward. My son is hoping to sit 2 more GCSEs (plus hopefully the deferred one) and 3 or 4 IGCSEs in summer 2021. We do not have tutors (a couple of the subjects he attends tutorials that I tutor but that feels a conflict). We can't really afford them, plus it would not suit his style of learning. A grading system that is not externally assessed would be very problematic for us.

Whatever system is agreed, clear guidelines need to be given to exam centres as soon as possible and communicated to home educators. As mentioned my son suffers from anxiety, I understand a global pandemic makes things uncertain but we need to be able to plan as best we can.

The other concern is exam centre access itself. I have been working hard to help my exam centre stay financially afloat (it is a CIC). The exam cancellations have impacted financially on home educators as we self fund exams. We are already hearing of exam centres saying they won't deal with private candidates in future. I do have some sympathy with smaller centres, this summer has been very difficult. We need support to enable access to exams. My personal concern is the centre we use will not be able to cope with demand.