



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

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12 August 2020

To all MPs in England

Dear Colleague,

Re: Exam results summer 2020

Tomorrow, students across England will receive A and AS level results, and results for other vocational and technical qualifications, and the vast majority will receive the grades they need to move on to the next stage of their lives, be that college, university, an apprenticeship or work.

Back in March, I took the difficult decision, in light of the public health emergency, to cancel all GCSE, AS and A level exams due to take place in schools and colleges in England this summer.

Since exams were cancelled, Ofqual, the independent qualifications regulator, has developed a process that will provide a calculated grade for each student for each subject, which reflects their performance as fairly as possible. While no alternative system could be a perfect substitute for real exams, our over-riding objective has been to ensure that wherever possible students receive qualifications this summer which have the same value as in any other year and which will enable them to move on successfully.

The Minister for Schools wrote to you earlier this week, and I would like to set out again how this process works. For each student, schools and colleges have provided a 'centre assessment grade' for each subject – the grade they would be most likely to have achieved had exams gone ahead. Schools and colleges also placed the students in rank order within each grade in each subject and submitted this data to the exam boards. Despite concerns that these judgements would be subject to bias, provisional data shows that there will generally be no widening of the gaps in attainment between different groups of students this year.

The circumstances this year meant that schools and colleges did not have the opportunity to develop a common approach to grading in advance, so it is likely that some centres will be more generous in their judging, and others more severe. Therefore, to make sure that those grades are consistent across different schools and colleges, exam boards have implemented a process of standardisation, using a model developed with Ofqual, to arrive at the final calculated grade. This makes sure that nationally grades are not significantly

higher than in previous or future years. If this process were not applied, provisional data published by Ofqual suggest that overall A level results for England would be up, compared to 2019, by 12 percentage points at grade A and above. At GCSE overall results would be up by 9 percentage points at grade 4 and above.

Such unprecedented year on year increases in national results would undermine the value of qualifications and be unfair to students from previous and subsequent years. As it stands, following standardisation, Ofqual has said that there are likely to be slightly more higher grades than in previous years, by around 2 percentage points at A level grade A and above, and up to 1 percentage point at grade 4 and above at GCSE.

Ideally, the best method for judging students' performance would have been exams and assessments taking place as in every previous summer. I am confident, however, that this alternative process for determining results this year is as fair as possible in the circumstances.

Nevertheless, I recognise that any process of this kind has limitations and, whilst we expect the vast majority of grades awarded to be accurate, it is essential that there is a robust appeals process in place. **To ensure fairness for all students, we have introduced a 'triple lock' which means that students can accept their calculated grade, appeal to receive a valid mock result, or sit autumn exams.** Schools can also appeal on the basis of process or data errors, including where schools have had a change of leadership or they have highly talented students but have not had strong results in the past.

To help support young people and their families, Ofqual has published guidance, including a student guide at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/your-results-what-next>, which outlines how the process works and what students' next steps might be, including if they are unhappy with their results. A national Exam Results Helpline will be operating from 8am to 10pm on 13 to 28 August for young people or their parents to speak to a professionally qualified careers adviser if they need advice on their next steps. The number for this is 0800 100 900.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a large, stylized initial 'G'.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education