A message from Ofqual

Dear parent/carer,

We know that it has been a really unsettling few months for students, since schools, colleges and other providers were closed to many and exams were cancelled. We are writing to reassure you about what has been put in place so students are able to move on to further study or employment, with results which carry the same value as any other year.

How grades have been set this year

After exams were cancelled we worked with exam boards and leading assessment experts to develop a reliable method to calculate student grades. This involved asking each school or college to tell us what grade they believed each student would have received in each subject if exams had gone ahead, and how their expected performance compared to others in their class. We know teachers worked extremely hard to deliver this year's arrangements and the majority of grades students receive will be the same, or within one grade, as their centre's judgements - reflecting the skills, professionalism and integrity of those involved.

Schools and colleges used a range of evidence to make their judgements including non-exam assessments, results of homework assignments or mock exams and any other records of student performance over the course of study. At least two teachers were involved in agreeing each proposed grade, and each one was signed off by the head teacher or college principal.

Making sure results are as fair as they can be

It is really important that we make sure the same standard is applied for all students, whichever school, college, or part of the country they come from. That's why we have calculated all results using the same method, which makes sure we have a level playing field for all students and results across the country are comparable. The overwhelming majority of people who responded to our consultation – including teachers and students - supported the aims of our moderation approach, because they know that if the results were not moderated, they would be unfair.

This means that this year's results will have the same value as in any other year. Students, universities, colleges and employers can have confidence in the results - allowing the class of 2020 to compete fairly with students from previous and future years.

Despite some reports, you can be assured that the moderation process does not mean a blanket reduction in the grades that teachers put forward. Adjustments will vary across schools and colleges, and in different subjects, and will only be made where the evidence supports them.

The grades awarded will be based either entirely on the teachers' judgements, or on a combination of their judgements and the statistical moderation. Where the moderation process finds that a school or college has over or under-estimated the likely number of students achieving a grade, the students who are moved up or down a grade are those the centre felt were closest to the grade boundary. No grade is being awarded purely on the basis of statistics.

Although the process of moderation is essential to ensure results are as fair as they can be, there is nothing fair about the fact that Covid-19 has denied young people this year the chance to demonstrate their skills in an exam. For that reason, where possible we have made decisions that work in students' favour and overall results will be more lenient.

Of course, we can never know for sure how an individual student might have performed in their exams. Universities and colleges understand this, and many have committed to showing flexibility in their admissions decisions. Overall we believe these results will be as fair as they possibly can be in the absence of exams.

Appeals and complaints

The vast majority of students are going to receive grades that are fair and that will enable them to progress to their next stage. However we know there are some students and families who may want to appeal their grade. If this is the case, you should speak to your child's school or college. Schools or colleges have to be the ones that submit appeals, and will do so if they believe there has been an error or that the moderation process has not produced a reliable result.

We have published a guide on our website to help students and their families understand how appeals will operate this summer. This includes information on complaints about potential bias or discrimination. We believe such complaints will be rare, but they will need to be taken very seriously.

For more information on the next steps after students have received their results, contact the Exam Results Helpline on 0800 100 900. You can also contact Ofqual directly on 0300 303 3344, or by email at public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk.

To all students receiving their results, whatever their next step, we wish them well. They have experienced a unique disruption to their lives. Their grades awarded over the next two weeks will enable as many as possible to move on in their lives with a sense of pride in their hard work and achievements.