



**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
Secretary of State

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## **To all MPs in England**

Dear Colleague,

### GCSE and A level students to receive centre assessment grades

I am writing following the announcement that A level, AS level and GCSE students will receive the centre assessment grades submitted by their teachers this year.

### Providing results in 2020

On 18 March, we announced that we were going to have to close schools to the majority of pupils in order to slow the spread of coronavirus and protect the public health of the nation. I also confirmed that we would not go ahead with assessments or exams this year, and would work with the sector and Ofqual to ensure that young people would receive the qualifications they need.

It was not possible for exams to go ahead, but it was crucial that students were able to move onto the next stage of their lives. Therefore, on 3 April Ofqual announced that schools and colleges would be asked to provide centre assessment grades for their students and that exam boards would put these grades through a process of standardisation to ensure that overall grades were broadly in line with previous years.

On 15 April, Ofqual published a full public consultation on their approach, including the statistical standardisation of centre assessment grades. This was proposed because the circumstances this year meant that schools and colleges did not have the opportunity to develop a common approach to grading in advance. The consultation received over 12,000 responses and the overall grading methodology received the broad support of unions and other sector bodies.

Ofqual were transparent about there being some limitations to this approach, and we ensured there was a robust appeals system in place to deal with any schools and colleges who had experienced a process or data error.

Following the awarding of results in Scotland and the subsequent decision to revert to centre assessment grades, we looked again at the approach we had in

place. I believed we had to go further to ensure that students who were unhappy with the results could appeal, so announced that they could do so on the basis of a valid mock grade.

When A level and AS level were awarded on Thursday, we saw an overall increase in top grades. At A level, 2.5% more students received an A\* or an A, attainment was broadly in line with previous years, and more students got into university than ever before, including more from disadvantaged backgrounds.

### Centre assessment grades

However, it became clear that the algorithm has revealed a number of anomalies that had not been anticipated by Ofqual and which severely undermined confidence in the system. We heard from schools and colleges who had received grade profiles lower than in previous years, and students who had received grades much lower than those submitted by their teacher. We urgently looked into these issues and, following close working with the Chair and Chief Executive of Ofqual, we came to the view that reverting to centre assessment grades would be the fairest approach for young people.

The system resulted in too many inconsistent and unfair outcomes for A and AS level students to be resolved through appeals. Ultimately, when making decisions of such importance to young people, we must recognise that a system that doesn't work for all is not good enough.

GCSE students will therefore receive their centre assessment grades on Thursday, or their calculated grade if it was higher. A level students will be reissued with their centre assessment grades – any who received a calculated grade higher than their centre assessment grade will still receive the higher. This will result in some grade inflation, but this was deemed to be the fairest approach to avoid some students receiving grades that did not reflect their prior performance.

### Vocational and technical qualifications

Vocational and technical qualifications are provided by a range of awarding organisations, who each determined the most appropriate way to provide results this year. Overall, we have seen very stable outcomes for BTEC and other technical qualifications.

Most technical qualifications, including BTECs, were not subject to the same statistical standardisation approach as the Ofqual model for A levels and GCSEs. Vocational and technical students tend to take modular units which are assessed at regular points during their course. As they are structured very differently from general qualifications such as GCSEs and A levels, the awarding approach was also different. Calculated results tended to be based on centre assessment grades for any incomplete units alongside other sources of evidence, such as work already completed and graded. The vast majority were accepted without change. Regarding BTECs in particular, the awarding organisation, Pearson, has confirmed that to ensure fairness the very small number of grades that were

adjusted after quality assurance checks will be reviewed on a case by case basis with the school or college.

For the small number of qualifications that did use a statistical standardisation approach similar to the Ofqual model for A levels and GCSEs, the relevant awarding organisations have been asked to review their approach. This is likely to mean a small proportion of results may be reissued, but the overwhelming majority of grades submitted by teachers for technical qualifications were not altered.

#### Progression into higher education

We recognise that the move to centre assessment grades has significant implications for universities and students, so we are lifting student number caps to help ensure there is no barrier to students being able to progress. We are working closely with the sector to create additional capacity and ensure they are as flexible as possible, and are setting a clear expectation that they honour all offers made and met. The Universities Minister is leading a new taskforce to coordinate this work. Students who previously missed their offer and will now meet it on the basis of their centre assessment grade should get in contact with the university. Those who have accepted another offer will be able to release themselves if they have a preferred offer reinstated.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

**Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP**  
**Secretary of State for Education**