



# Update on summer 2020 GCSEs, AS and A level grades for students in year 10 and below and for private candidates

Decisions following consultation

## Decision on eligibility of students in year 10 and below to receive a calculated grade

Calculated grades will be issued by exam boards this summer because the exams have been cancelled by the government in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. We proposed in our consultation, that was open 15 – 29 April 2020, that there should be no age or year group restriction on students' eligibility to receive calculated grades for GCSEs, AS and A levels.

We received 12,623 responses to the consultation. We will publish later this month a summary of responses and details of all of our decisions taken following the consultation. However, students, their teachers and the exam boards need to know whether there will be any age or year group restriction on which students will be eligible to receive a calculated grade. We have, therefore, made an early decision on this question.

The majority of respondents agreed that we should not restrict eligibility to a calculated grade by age or year group. Most of those who responded in favour of the proposal broadly argued that if younger students were not able to receive a grade they would be disadvantaged because their school would not continue to teach them the subject. Some argued specifically that disabled students and students with special educational needs who were planning to spread their GCSE entries over a number of years would be particularly disadvantaged if they were unable to receive a calculated grade this summer. We also received arguments that students who had planned to take exams in community languages would be disadvantaged if we restricted eligibility by age or year group because these students often take their GCSEs in these languages at a younger age. It would be disruptive to their plans if they could not receive a grade this summer.

The respondents who argued against the proposal challenged the view that schools with early entry practices could not change their teaching plans for the coming academic year and that allowing some students in years 10 and 9 to receive calculated grades would be unfair on the majority of students in these year groups

who would take their exams in future years. Some of the respondents argued that the practice of early entry was generally detrimental to students' learning.

Some respondents suggested we should have a differential approach and allow only younger students who would be significantly disadvantaged if they did not receive a calculated grade to receive one.

Having considered the responses to the consultation we have decided that students of any age and in any year group who had been entered to take exams this summer will be able to receive a calculated grade on the same basis as other students this summer. Arrangements are complex and are being put in place at speed. We do not believe there would be merit in diverting resource to identifying which students would experience real detriment if they could not receive a calculated grade this summer.

The Head of Centre will need to submit to the exam board for such students a centre assessment grade and include them in the centre's overall rank order for each subject.

The exam boards are now allowing centres to amend their entries. Centres that had entered students in year 10 and below for exams this summer will be able to retain those entries or withdraw them if they would prefer their students were not part of the exceptional arrangements for summer 2020. <sup>1</sup>

## Private candidates

We also consulted on arrangements for private candidates this summer. We proposed that exam boards should only be allowed to issue grades for private candidates for whom they had received from a Head of Centre a centre assessment grade and a rank order position. In other words, their grades should be awarded on the same basis as all other students.

Some private candidates have been particularly anxious about their options and so we have also prioritised our consideration of responses to that part of the consultation.

The majority of respondents considered our proposal necessary for the fairness and integrity of the approach. However, most private candidates themselves and their parents or carers disagreed. Many explained the reluctance of the centre with which they had planned to take their exams to provide them with a centre assessment grade and rank order position and the impact this would have on their ability to progress in the next academic year as they had planned.

We have considered the alternative suggestions made by respondents. These included: for re-sitting students, issuing them with a grade one higher than the grade they already have; for GCSE students, issuing them with a grade 4 so they can

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<sup>1</sup> The DfE has made it clear that no performance tables will be published based on 2020 results. This means that they will not include calculated grades from summer 2020, or results from any exams in autumn 2020, in performance tables for future years. In particular results awarded this summer or autumn for students in year 10 or below will not be included in performance tables in 2021. The same will apply to students in year 12 or below who are awarded A level results this summer.

progress to A levels or into further education; and basing their grade on the views of their private tutor and/or their parents.

We are not persuaded that any of these alternatives would allow valid grades to be issued. The approaches suggested would not be fair for all students as they would not be based on objective consideration of reliable evidence of a student's likely performance had the exams taken place. Those who will rely on the qualifications could not be confident that grades issued in any of these ways were reliable.

Some respondents suggested that private candidates should be allowed to sit exams this summer, however the government has decided that exams will not take place for reasons of public health; schools and colleges remain largely closed. Allowing some candidates to sit exams would go against the government's decision and would introduce public health, logistical, security and fairness risks.

A number of respondents suggested that private candidates should be allowed to transfer to another exam centre and to work with that centre to provide them with evidence of their likely performance had the exams gone ahead. We agree with this suggestion.

We have been concerned about the potential negative impact of the cancellation of exams on private candidates and we have worked with the exam boards to explore alternative options. Last week exam boards set out new guidance, and we [published an update to our Information document](#), about the alternative sources of evidence a school or college might consider where it does not have sufficient evidence about a student's attainment to submit a centre assessment grade and rank order information. Additionally, we and the exam boards have concluded that there is scope for more private candidates to transfer to a new centre and that, with the approval of the exam board, the new centre could work with the student to review and validate existing evidence of their work and for additional evidence to be generated under supervised conditions where appropriate. This would be in line with the approach suggested by a number of respondents to the consultation.

The Head of Centre will, if confident in the evidence seen, be able to provide the student with a centre assessment grade and include them in the centre's rank order so the exam board can, in turn, issue a calculated grade. Heads of Centre will need to have the same level of confidence in the centre assessment grade and rank order position of a private candidate as they have for all other students.

We recognise that this option will not be appropriate for all private candidates – there may not be a suitable centre with capacity or the arrangements may not suit every student. We expect that centres might prioritise students who need a grade this summer for their immediate progression. However, given the lack of any credible alternatives identified by us, the exam boards or respondents to the consultation, and the need to make sure all grades are issued on a fair and robust basis, we have decided that, in line with our proposal, exam boards will only be allowed to issue calculated grades to students for whom a Head of Centre has provided a centre assessment grade and a position in the centre's rank order.

Private candidates unable to receive a calculate grade this summer will be interested in arrangements for the additional autumn exam series which the government

announced would take place when it cancelled the summer exams. We will start to consult on arrangements for this series over the next few weeks.