



Dr Julian Lewis
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

28 May 2020

Dear Dr Lewis,

PQ 44945: To ask the Secretary of State for Education, what plans he has in place to ensure that the GCSE and A-level grades awarded to pupils at improving schools in disadvantaged areas including New Forest Academy which are projected to achieve significantly better results in 2020 than in 2019 are an adequate reflection of those projections; and if he will put in place means of appeal other than on administrative grounds for students awarded grades that their school considers to be inappropriate or unfair.

Since the Secretary of State for Education announced that the 2020 exam series in England would be cancelled to help fight the spread of Coronavirus (COVID-19), we have worked at speed to develop a process which fairly recognises students' work and makes sure they get their grades in time to progress.

We launched a public consultation¹, which ran from 15 April to 29 April, seeking views on aspects of our proposed assessment arrangements for GCSEs, AS and A levels. We received over 12,500 responses to our consultation, and on 22 May we published our decisions.²

In our consultation, we invited views as to the relative weight that the model should place on historical evidence of centre performance (given the prior attainment of students) versus the submitted centre assessment grades. We proposed that using an approach which emphasises historical evidence of centre performance (given the prior attainment of students) is likely to be fairest for all students. The majority of consultation respondents

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020>

² <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020>

agreed with us or were neutral towards this proposal. In our decisions we conclude that the statistical standardisation model should place more weight on historical evidence of centre performance (given the prior attainment of students) than the submitted centre assessment grades where that will increase the likelihood of students getting the grades that they would most likely have achieved had they been able to complete their assessments in summer 2020. However, any potential variation in the weight allocated to historical evidence will be on the basis of the predictive accuracy of the standardisation model itself.

In our consultation we also invited views as to whether the standardisation model ought to seek to reflect any trends in improvement or deterioration in outcomes over previous years (the trajectory of the centre). We set out in the consultation our reservations about reflecting the trajectory of centres' results due to potential unfairness caused by the unreliability of any trajectory predictions and the disadvantage that this might cause students in those centres with stable results. We also acknowledge in our consultation that there is no statistical way of accommodating changes in centre trajectory that might have occurred this year, if the exams had proceeded as planned, such as those centres expecting a turnaround in results because of changes at the centre this year. Having considered all the options available to us in the circumstances of awarding grades in summer 2020, we have decided to adopt our proposal that the trajectory of centres' results should not be included in the statistical standardisation process. Again in this case, the majority of consultation respondents agreed with us or were neutral towards this proposal.

We are trialling different standardisation approaches to evaluate how best to combine evidence to most accurately standardise centre assessment grades. We have set up an External Advisory Group, who have commented on the statistical approaches being trialled and on the measures of accuracy against which they are being tested to ensure that such approaches are as accurate as possible.

We know that some centres might believe that their students in 2020 would have performed better, had exams taken place, than their 2018 and 2019 cohorts, even when prior attainment was taken into account. We also recognise the potential for such centres to feel dissatisfied if results this year were constrained by the performance of their students in recent years. In these exceptional cases, it may be that the best way for students to demonstrate their abilities will be to take exams in the autumn series.

Our consultation also considered whether appeals should include the opportunity to review the outcomes of the statistical process. In our consultation we proposed that, in the exceptional circumstances of this summer, appeals should only be allowed on the grounds that the centre made a data error when submitting its information; or similarly, that the exam board made a mistake when calculating, assigning or communicating a grade.

Having considered all the options available to us in the circumstances of awarding grades in summer 2020 we have decided not to provide for appeals in respect of the operation or outcome of the statistical standardisation model.

The consistent application of the statistical standardisation process is central to the maintenance of standards in these qualifications this year. To vary the application of the statistical standardisation model for one student or for a centre's cohort of students, as a result of an appeal, would be unfair to other students at other centres and would undermine standards.

Also, we have not been able to identify any evidence that could be presented in support of such a challenge which could be considered in a way that would be fair for all students and centres. You can find more detailed information on factors we have considered in our consultation decisions document.³

However, based on feedback received⁴, we have decided to investigate whether it would be possible, using previous years' national data, to identify how any significant changes in the demographic make-up of a centre's cohort would likely have affected its students' exam performance this year, relative to previous years and how such evidence could be used in an appeal by a centre about the reliability of the data used by an exam board when it standardised its centre assessment grades. We will aim to make and announce a decision on this possibility before the end of June.

We are currently considering arrangements for an additional exam series in the autumn, in accordance with government policy. This will be open to students who had entered to take exams this summer. As highlighted, the autumn series will be an important opportunity for students who believe they have received a lower calculated grade than they would have achieved had they been able to sit the summer exams to show what they can do.

I do hope this information is useful.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "S Collier". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Sally Collier

Chief Regulator

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/exceptional-arrangements-for-exam-grading-and-assessment-in-2020>

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