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Student guide to awarding summer 2021

GCSEs, AS and A levels, vocational, technical and other general qualifications

INTRODUCTION

The government has said that many exams and assessments cannot be held fairly this year as a result of the disruption students have faced due to the pandemic.

Your teachers will instead submit grades to the exam boards, based on their assessment of what you have shown you know and can do, enabling you to progress to the next stage of your education, training, or employment.

This guide outlines the arrangements in place for awarding grades in summer 2021, and where you can go for additional information.

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GENERAL QUALIFICATIONS

This information is relevant to all students in England who are entered for qualifications regulated by Ofqual and offered by AQA, OCR, Pearson, WJEC Eduqas, ASDAN and City & Guilds:

- GCSEs (including short course GCSEs)
- AS and A levels
- Project qualifications (L1, L2 and EPQ)
- Advanced Extension Awards (AEA) in maths

International GCSEs and international A levels are not Ofqual regulated qualifications. For information on these qualifications, please contact the relevant exam board directly.

How GCSEs, AS and A levels will be awarded in summer 2021: a summary

How your grade will be determined

- graded by teacher judgement, with grades signed off by your head of department and your head teacher or principal before being submitted to the exam board
- not graded by an algorithm
- school and college assessments can continue - your school or college will let you know the timings of any assessments
- you'll only be assessed on what you've been taught
- your school or college will tell you the evidence they will use to determine your grade
- you will not be told what grade has been submitted for you
- if you're a private candidate you can work with a school, college or other exam centre to provide evidence on which your grades will be based

Evidence

- a range of evidence can be used, such as mocks, tests and work you have already done
- non-exam assessment (often known as coursework) should continue
- non-exam assessment can be used as evidence even if incomplete
- art & design grades will be based only on your portfolio
- schools and colleges can use questions provided by exam boards if they choose to do so
- your school or college must follow guidance when determining your grades and the exam boards will check they have done so

Results days

- AS and A level: 10 August
- GCSE: 12 August

Appeals

If, when you receive your results, you are concerned that your grade is wrong there is an appeals process in place. Your first step should be to speak to your school or college for feedback and advice. You can find out more details from your school, college or exam board. See also, 'What to do if you think your grade is wrong'.

Arrangements for private candidates

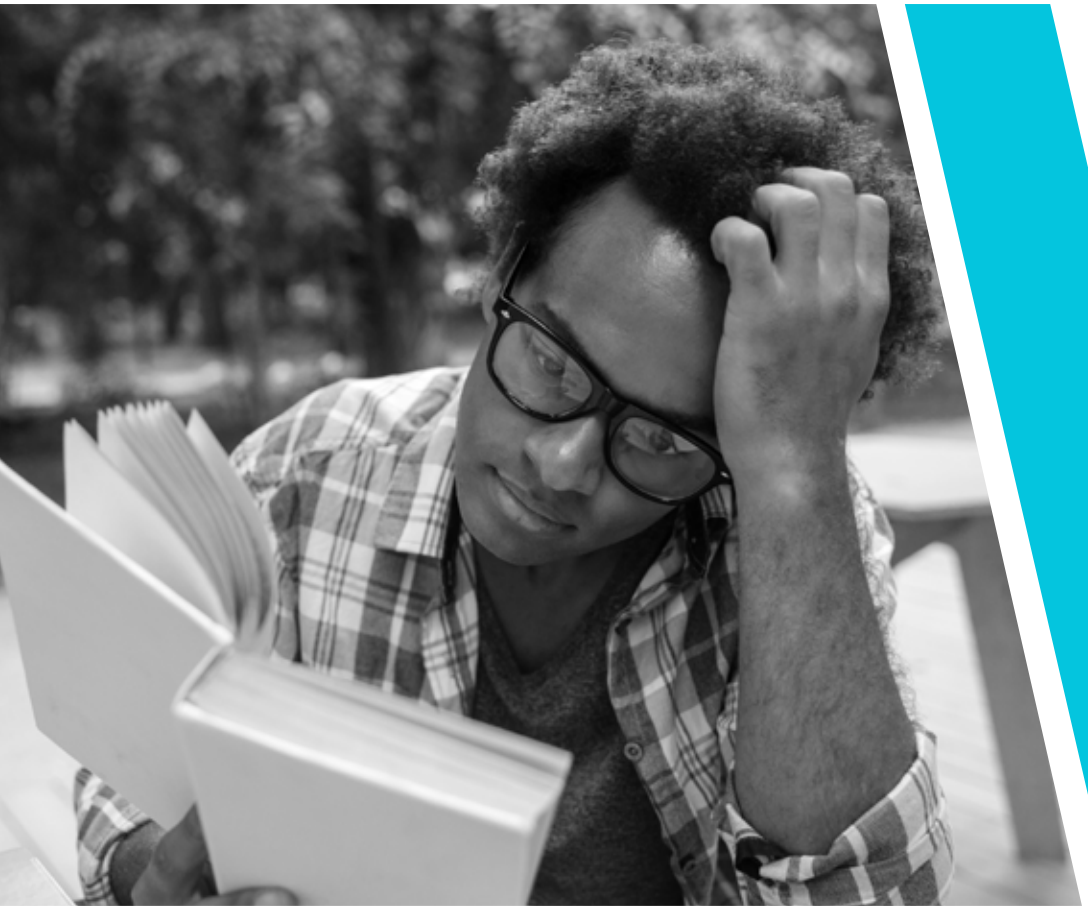
Private candidates are students who do not study in a school or college, for example, students studying independently, home educated students, and students studying to re-take a qualification.

If you are a private candidate studying GCSE, AS or A levels, you will need to work with a school, college or exam centre to provide evidence on which your grade will be based. The evidence needed will be the same sort of evidence on which other students' grades will be based.

The school, college or exam centre will tell you about their assessment approach, which will be checked by the exam boards.

JCQ has published a list of centres willing to work with private candidates. Private candidates can work with centres not on this list where they have arrangements in place.

The exam boards have provided guidance for centres taking on private candidates, and UCAS has provided additional information for private candidates.



Timelines

APRIL

MAY

JUNE

JULY

AUGUST

SEPTEMBER

April to May: You will continue to learn and may carry out some assessments during this time. This might include questions from the exam board. You will continue with any non-exam assessment (often known as coursework).

May to June: You might know some of the marks you have achieved in assessments, but you won't be told your teacher-assessed grade. Your school or college will carry out checks to make sure that they have followed the guidance properly when working out your grades. You can find out more about quality assurance further on in this document.

18 June: This is the deadline for your school or college to submit your teacher-assessed grades for GCSE, AS and A levels. Schools and colleges may have submitted grades before this deadline.

April to July:

Exam boards will carry out their own quality assurance checks. These are in place to make sure that schools and colleges have followed the guidance when awarding grades.

10 August
AS and A level results

12 August
GCSE results

August to September: If you are concerned your grade may be wrong there is an appeals process in place. Your first step should be to speak to your school or college to seek their feedback and advice.

17 September: Deadline for submitting an appeal of your GCSE, AS or A level grade.

It is important to remember that schools and colleges might take slightly different approaches, and so your individual timeline might look a bit different, though the key dates will be the same. If you have any specific questions about what is happening and when, you should talk to your school or college.

Evidence

What

- your teachers will assess the standard at which you are performing, but they will only assess you on content you have been taught
- evidence might include work that you have already completed, mock exam results, homework or in-class tests
- non-exam assessment work (often referred to as coursework) can also be used as evidence, even if it is not fully completed
- exam boards have provided a package of assessment and support materials to schools, colleges and other exam centres, including questions and mark schemes - your school or college may decide to use these as part of the evidence they gather to determine your grade

When

- evidence about your performance throughout your course can be used to help your teacher decide your grade
- if you are unable to attend school or college because you are shielding or isolating, you should speak to your school or college who will consider how you could provide additional evidence
- your school or college can't tell you the grade they have submitted for you before results day, but they should tell you what evidence they will use to determine your grade

Students who are entitled to reasonable adjustments

Schools and colleges have a responsibility to put in place reasonable adjustments for eligible students. If some of the evidence has been produced without a reasonable adjustment in place, your teachers should take that into account when determining your teacher-assessed grade. If you're concerned you should raise this with your school or college.

Assessment in GCSE, AS and A level art & design

Your grades will be based on your portfolio only. You should not be penalised if you were unable to complete your portfolio due to circumstances beyond your control.

Separate results for practical and spoken language skills

For GCSE English language, GCSE modern foreign languages, A level sciences (biology, chemistry, physics) and A level geology, you will receive a separate grade or result for the spoken language or practical skills tested, based on work you have completed.

Tiers of entry

Your school or college will give you a grade that is in line with the tier you have been entered for. If you are entered for foundation tier for a subject, your teacher-assessed grade in that subject will not be above a grade 5, as in any other year. You should discuss with your teacher if you're not sure what tier you are entered for.

Completion of non-exam assessment

You should aim to complete your non-exam assessment (often known as coursework) as you have been advised by your teachers. The non-exam assessment will provide your teachers with evidence to support your grade. If you are not able to complete it due to circumstances outside your control you will not be penalised. Your teachers will look at what you have been able to complete and can still use it as evidence for your grade.

Selecting the evidence used

Your school or college alone will decide which evidence to use to assess the standard at which you're performing. They will try and use the same sources of evidence for everyone in your class and the evidence will be specific to the subject. Your school or college will tell you which pieces of work will count towards your grade, before your grade is submitted to the exam board. You will have the opportunity to raise any genuine and valid concerns with your school or college.

It is really important that you and your parents or carers don't try to put your teachers under pressure to submit grades higher than the evidence supports. Head teachers and principals have been asked to keep records of such cases and exam boards may treat this behaviour as malpractice.

Taking exceptional circumstances into account

If you suffered a bereavement, for example, or there were other factors outside your control that might have impacted on your performance when producing evidence, you should discuss this with your school or college.

Use of exam board tasks

Your school or college will decide whether, and if so how, to use the exam board tasks and they will tell you if these need to be taken under exam conditions.

Quality assurance

Your school or college and the exam boards will carry out checks to make sure that your school or college has followed the necessary guidance when submitting your grades.

Each school or college will have its own policy that sets out how they will determine grades this year. The exam boards will review these policies before grades are submitted.

Schools and colleges will carry out their own quality assurance of your grade. This might involve checking that grades are consistent between individual teachers or asking another teacher to give a second view on your mark for a particular assessment.

Your head teacher or principal will submit a declaration to the exam board confirming they have met the requirements set by the exam boards when determining your grade.

Once the exam boards receive the teacher-assessed grades they will ask every school and college to send them samples of student work. Exam board subject experts, made up of experienced examiners, will review the evidence from a sample of centres. This random sample will cover a range of centre types and regions. The exam boards will also look at evidence from new schools or colleges that might need more support, and from schools and colleges where the results are significantly different to their historical results when compared to other centres. This includes centres where grades are much higher or much lower than in previous years.

In these sample checks, exam boards will check that the academic judgement has been reasonable when deciding grades. If the exam board is concerned this isn't the case, they will ask the school or college to look into this and may ask them to resubmit grades. Exam boards will not issue results until they are satisfied with the outcome of any investigation.

What to do if you think your grade is wrong

Appeals

Your teacher should have received training, support and guidance on how to determine your teacher-assessed grades, and there are checks in place to make sure their judgements are as fair and consistent as possible.

Every year there are students who are disappointed with the grade they achieve. If you're disappointed with your grade you might consider whether you could sit exams in the autumn series to improve your grade.

If you are concerned that the grade you have received is wrong, there is an appeals process. If you appeal, your grade could go up, down, or stay the same. **The deadline for submitting an appeal is 17 September**.

The appeals process

1. If you think your grade is wrong, you should first ask your school or college to check whether they made a mistake in determining or submitting the grade.
2. If they identify a mistake, your school or college can submit a revised grade to the exam board to consider.
3. If they don't identify an error but you still believe that your grade is wrong, you can ask your school or college to submit a formal appeal to the exam board for you.

   You can appeal for any of the following reasons:

   - there was an error in the way the school or college followed or applied its procedure for determining your teacher assessed grade
   - the school or college did not make a reasonable judgement when deciding which evidence to use to determine your teacher assessed grade
   - the school or college did not make a reasonable judgement about your grade based on the evidence gathered
4. The exam board will consider whether your school or college followed its written process, and review the evidence your grade was based on.
5. The exam board will consider if your grade needs correcting. They may do this if they believe your grade is not a reasonable judgement or they find a mistake in the procedure which affected your grade. A corrected grade could be higher or lower than the grade you were given on results day.
6. The final route of appeal is Ofqual's Exam Procedure Review Service (EPRS). You can apply to EPRS if the exam board decides that the grade you were awarded is reasonable, and your school or college correctly followed its procedure, but you are still concerned that there may have been an error in the procedure used by the exam board to conduct the appeal. The EPRS can consider whether the exam board has followed its rules and procedures. It will not consider whether you got the right grade based on the evidence of your work. The exam board's final decision on your grade will stand unless the EPRS finds that the exam board made an error in its review procedure. Even if an error is found, your grade may stay the same.

Important things to remember

- teachers will share with you which pieces of work they will base their judgements on before they submit your grades to the exam board
- your school or college will carry out multiple checks on your grades. Exam boards will check your school or college's approach and will be checking a sample of grades across the system
- the appeal questions whether the original decision was a reasonable one, and not whether other reasonable decisions could have been made
- a grade will only be changed if there was an error when determining or submitting the grade, or if the grade given could not have reasonably been reached based on the evidence presented
- the appeals arrangements will provide an important safety net if there is clear evidence something went wrong when a grade was determined
- your school or college is expected to submit an appeal on your behalf if you ask for one. If you're concerned that your school or college won't submit an appeal on your behalf, you should contact your exam board
- when your appeal is submitted, you will need to explain why you think your result was incorrect and should be changed
- if you appeal, your grade can go up, down or stay the same
- if you are concerned there may have been wrongdoing when developing your teacher-assessed grade you should first discuss this with your school or college
- if you have evidence of malpractice or maladministration, you can contact your exam board directly

Autumn exam series

Exam boards will be offering exams in October for AS and A levels, and in November and December for GCSEs. Exams will be available for all GCSE and A level subjects, and for AS in biology, chemistry, physics, maths and further maths. Exam boards may offer AS exams in other subjects. You should check with the relevant exam board directly whether they will provide exams for any other subjects at AS.

The exams will be in a standard format and no adaptations will be made other than reasonable adjustments for eligible students.

All subjects will be assessed by exam except art & design which will be assessed by a task set and marked by the exam board. Your grade will be determined by your performance on this task.

The exams will assess you in the same way as had been planned for exams in summer 2021, including assessing you on a reduced number of topics for GCSE English literature, history and ancient history.

You can take exams in the autumn if you received a teacher-assessed grade in summer 2021 in the same subject or your exam board believes that you would have taken exams this summer had they not been cancelled. This may apply to private candidates.

If you get a higher grade in your autumn exam than you get this summer, then you can ask the exam board to provide a new certificate showing your higher grade.

VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL QUALIFICATIONS

How vocational and technical qualifications will be awarded in summer 2021: a summary

Qualifications most similar to GCSEs and A levels used for progression to further or higher education

For example, BTECs, OCR Cambridge Technicals and Core Maths, which do not ordinarily focus on occupational skills.

Your results will be:

- determined by teacher or lecturer judgement
- based on evidence of your performance, such as course work and any tasks or exams completed
- issued no later than for GCSEs and A levels

Other qualifications used for progression, but which are different from GCSEs or A levels

For example, Functional Skills and ESOL Skills for Life, which do not assess occupational skills, and which are taken when you are ready.

Assessments should continue to go ahead for these qualification. If you cannot safely access an assessment your result can be based on teacher judgement – in this case your results will be:

- determined by teacher or lecturer judgement
- based on evidence of your performance, such as course work and any tasks or exams completed
- issued in the usual timescales

Qualifications which assess occupational skills or proficiency

For example, construction, plumbing and electrical qualifications.

Assessments:

- can continue as normal where possible
- can be adapted if needed
- may be delayed

Your results will be issued in the usual timescales once you have taken your assessment.

> See Ofqual's qualification explainer tool to find out how your qualification will be awarded in 2021. Further information on individual qualifications, including assessment methods used and evidence requirements, can be found on your awarding organisation's website.

How vocational, technical and other general qualifications will be awarded

The way that vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) and other general qualifications will be awarded in 2021 takes into account the impact of the pandemic. Many students will have missed teaching and learning due to multiple lockdowns and some students will not have covered all the content, especially those on 2-year programmes of study.

The arrangements should enable you to be awarded a qualification and to progress in your learning or employment.

Qualifications that are similar to GCSEs, AS or A levels and used for progression to further or higher education

If you are studying for a qualification that is similar to, or taken alongside GCSEs, AS or A levels, and is used in a similar way to progress to higher education (HE) or further education (FE), then you will be eligible for a result based partly or totally on a teacher-assessed grade. Your teacher or lecturer will make an informed judgement on your result using a variety of evidence, such as any assessments that have already been completed. This evidence might also include tasks you will complete in early summer. These judgements will be quality assured within your college, training provider or school, and then by the awarding organisation that you are registered with before you get your result.

Examples of these types of qualification are BTECs (Pearson) and OCR Cambridge Technicals in subjects such as business, digital media and health & social care.

If your qualification has an element of occupational competency, you will probably still need to have completed the assessment for this in order to receive a qualification result. Your college, training provider or school can tell you if this is the case.

You should receive your results at the same time as GCSEs, AS and A levels results.

Other qualifications used for progression, but which are different from GCSEs or A levels

For other qualifications used for progression, but which are different from GCSEs or A levels and that are taken when you are ready, such as Functional Skills and ESOL Skills for Life, there are three ways you may be able to access an assessment.

Assessments should continue to take place, either:

- in a college or training provider, employer premises, school, or alternative location, where it is safe for them to do so in line with public health guidance
- online in a wider range of venues, including at home

Where neither of these options is possible, and you need a result to progress, then you may be able to receive a result based on a teacher-assessed grade. Your teacher or lecturer will base the teacher-assessed grade on evidence of your performance.

This should enable you to progress to the next stage of your studies or employment this year and not be delayed. It will also mean that you will be able to progress and move into employment, for example if you need a Functional Skills qualification to complete your apprenticeship. Speak to your college, training provider or school for further information.

Qualifications that require a demonstration of occupation or professional competence or proficiency

If you are studying for a qualification that requires a demonstration of occupation or professional competence or proficiency, then you will need to be assessed on your practical skills before you can get your certificate and progress to the workplace.

Assessments for these types of qualifications should be continuing where possible, although your assessment may be held in slightly different circumstances (using remote assessment, for example) or may be adapted in another way. Your assessment may need to be delayed until it can be carried out safely in line with public health guidance.

Examples of these types of qualification are plumbing, accountancy, performing arts graded exams, construction, and veterinary work.

These arrangements should enable you to get a result that will allow you to progress.

Arrangements for private candidates

Awarding organisations are required to include private candidates in their arrangements as far as possible. If you are a private candidate and you are unable to find a centre, contact your awarding organisation and they will link you with an available centre.

If you were offered or sat exams in January

If you are taking a vocational and technical qualification most like GCSEs, AS and A levels and you were either absent from January exams, or you feel that your performance was adversely affected by the pandemic and the most recent lockdown, you may still be able to receive a result using a teacher-assessed grade.

Talk to your college, training provider or school about the arrangements being offered by the awarding organisation that you are registered with.

What to do if you think your grade is wrong

If you are concerned that your teacher-assessed grade is wrong then your college, training provider or school and awarding organisation will have an appeals process in place to help you. Broadly speaking, the basis of appeals will be quite similar to that for GCSEs and A levels this year. During an appeal, the awarding organisation will check that centres have reasonably used academic judgement when deciding grades and that there have been no process errors or administrative errors. If you need more information check your awarding organisation's website.

Appeals relating to results for all other vocational, technical and other general qualifications should follow the usual process set out by your college, training provider or school, and awarding organisation.

Quality assurance for teacher-assessed grades

Quality assurance processes are the checks that will be carried out to make sure that your college, training provider or school has followed the guidance from awarding organisations when producing your grades.

If you are expecting a result based on a teacher-assessed grade, colleges, training providers and schools will put in place internal quality assurance arrangements. They should have a clear policy for how they are going to make judgements about the grades they think you deserve.

Your head teacher or principal may submit a declaration to the awarding organisation confirming they have met the awarding organisation's requirements for quality assurance.

The awarding organisation may review the arrangements that each college, training provider or school has put in place before grades are submitted. The awarding organisation may also request a sample of learner work that has been used to support the teacher-assessed grade as part of their checks. If the awarding organisation is concerned that the quality of the work does not reflect the grade submitted, they will speak to your college, training provider or school to resolve any concerns identified by the checks.

If you are taking an assessment or an adapted assessment, your college, training provider or school and awarding organisation should have quality assurance processes in place that are appropriate for your qualification – speak to them for further information.

Check arrangements for your specific qualification

> See Ofqual's qualification explainer tool to find out how your qualification will be awarded in 2021.

What you can expect next

Your teacher or lecturer can let you know what is happening with your qualification – whether you will be expected to take your assessments, or if your results will be awarded using teacher-assessed grades. You should continue to study in the meantime.

Autumn exam series

Some awarding organisations already offer assessments in the autumn term or in January, and those that don't may choose to do so this year. You should talk to your college, training provider or school if you want to use this as an opportunity to get or improve your grade.

ACCESSING MORE INFORMATION AND SUPPORT

Additional information for all qualifications

What you can expect next if you sat exams in January but feel your performance was affected

If you are taking GCSE, AS, A level or vocational and technical qualifications similar to these, and you were either absent from January exams, or you feel that your performance was adversely affected by the pandemic and the most recent lockdown, you may be able to receive a result using a teacher assessed grade.

Talk to your college, training provider or school about the arrangements being offered by the awarding organisation that you are registered with.

Having confidence in your grades

We know that you will want to be confident your grades are meaningful and serve their usual purpose.

Your teachers and lecturers are professionals who know you well. Schools, colleges and training providers understand that it is in your best interest that grades reflect what you know and can do, so that you can progress to the pathway that is most appropriate for you. Schools, colleges and training providers want you to make the best choices about your next steps and it wouldn't be helpful if you started studying a subject at a higher level that you aren't prepared for.

We have asked schools, colleges and training providers to assume that it is no easier or harder for a student to achieve a particular grade this year compared to previous years. Awarding organisations will also check a sample of evidence from a range of subjects from different schools, colleges and training providers.

Finding out your teacher-assessed grade

You are not able to find out your teacher-assessed grade for AS, A levels and GCSEs. You may know some of the marks awarded for some of the evidence your school or college is using but your teachers are not able to tell you your teacher assessed grade.

It will be the same situation for many vocational and technical qualifications. But there may be some where teachers or lecturers ordinarily submit marks or grades to awarding organisations and share this information with learners. These marks or grades will not yet have been through the awarding organisation's quality assurance and so should only be viewed as provisional.

If you are worried about teacher impartiality

Your teachers are professionals who have been asked to use a range of evidence to produce your teacher assessed grade. They have worked with other teachers to produce your teacher-assessed grade and your head teacher or principal must confirm that all grades have been determined appropriately. We've given guidance to schools, colleges and training providers on how to make objective judgements. If you still have concerns, talk to your school or college.

Minimum amount of content that must be covered

There are no requirements about the minimum amount of content that should be taught or assessed for teacher-assessed grades to be submitted, but you will need to have covered enough content for the grade to be meaningful. Awarding organisations and exam boards may ask the head of your school, college or training provider to confirm that you have been taught (or studied, if you are a private candidate) an appropriate amount of content to provide the basis for a grade.

Prioritising appeals for access to university and college admissions

Awarding organisations and exam boards will support schools, colleges and training providers to prioritise appeals where results are needed to progress to higher education. Where possible these priority appeals will be completed by early September. It is important that students submit their appeal before the deadline, which is 17 September for AS and A level. Most appeals where a higher education place is not affected should be completed by the end of October.

If you choose to appeal, you should contact your preferred university or college straight away to make them aware of your situation.

> UCAS have extended their deadline for you to meet any conditions of your offer to **7 September** to allow more time for appeals.

More information on 2021 qualifications and grading

There is more information from Ofqual on GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021 and vocational, technical and other general qualifications in 2021. JCQ have also published information on GCSEs, AS and A levels in 2021.

If you need more information on what's happening with a specific qualification that was scheduled to be taken in summer 2021, you can use our summer 2021 qualification explainer tool.

Results and next steps

If you want more information on your next steps once you've received your results, contact the National Exam Results Helpline.

National Careers Service website Tel: 0800 100 900

Lines are open from 08:00 to 22:00, 7 days a week. Calls are free from landlines and most mobile numbers.

Higher education applications and admissions

For any questions about higher education application and admissions you should contact the relevant institution directly. You can also contact UCAS for more information.

UCAS website Tel: 0371 468 0 468

Lines are open Monday to Friday, 08:30 to 18:00.

> UCAS will be running a series of live events on the UCAS Facebook page where you can ask questions about your application.

Exam boards

AQA

AQA website

Pearson

Pearson website

OCR

OCR website

WJEC Eduqas

WJEC Eduqas website

> Ofqual's Register contains information and website links for all awarding organisations regulated by Ofqual.

Ofqual

Ofqual website Email: public.enquiries@ofqual.gov.uk Tel: 0300 303 3344

The phone line is normally open from 09:00 to 17:00 on weekdays. Check out our website for opening times around results days.

Mental health support

Always make sure you speak to somebody if you are feeling anxious or struggling with your mental health. This might be a parent, carer or someone else you trust.

You can also contact

- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)
- Mind
- Young Minds
- NHS 111 – they can assist in providing the mental health support you may need

Equality Advisory and Support Service

You can contact the Equality Advisory and Support Service (EASS) for advice on discrimination concerns. EASS advises and assists individuals on issues relating to equality and human rights, across England, Scotland and Wales.

EASS website Tel: 0808 800 0082 Textphone: 0808 800 0084

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