COVID-19

Cancellation of Key Stage 4 and 5 External Examinations Summer 2020

This guidance is correct at the time of publishing.
However as it is subject to changes, please ensure that the information at time of issue is accurate and correct.
Cancellation of Key Stage 4 and 5 External Examinations Summer 2020 (COVID-19)
Updated April 30 2020

This guidance aims to answer common questions in relation to the cancellation Key Stage 4 and Key Stage 5 external examinations due to the Coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak in 2020.

Background
Isle of Man Schools and University College Isle of Man were closed to all pupils/students apart from the children of key workers and vulnerable pupils on March 23rd 2020 and all external exams were cancelled by examination boards operating regionally and internationally soon after.

This was part of both national and wider global approaches to manage Covid-19 infection rates and reduce the likelihood of hospitals being overwhelmed by patients needing very specialist care due to this novel viral infection.

Did exams need to be cancelled?
From Monday 23 March, all DESC educational settings were closed to everyone except the children of key workers and vulnerable children.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak is expected to continue having a significant impact on the education system, and the country, for months to come. Therefore, exams were cancelled to give pupils, parents, and teachers certainty, and enable schools and colleges to focus on supporting vulnerable children and the children of key workers.

What will happen to those who have already done some non-exam assessment?
Students who were due to sit A level, AS level, BTEC, IGCSE or other exams this summer will receive a calculated grade. The calculated grade process will take into account a range of evidence including, for example, non-exam assessment and mock results, and the approach will be standardised between schools and colleges by examination boards and regulatory bodies.

How will the process of teacher assessment for awarding of grades be made fair?
This summer’s calculated grades are not predicted grades. Each examination board and their regulator is developing a fair and robust process that takes into account a broad range of evidence, including assessments by schools and colleges of the grades that students would have been likely to attain if exams went ahead.
Will all students get their predicted grade?
No. We know that simply using predicted grades would not be fair to all students. The ‘centre assessment grade’ which the exam boards will ask schools and colleges to submit will take into account an assessment of the likely grade that students would have obtained had exams gone ahead, and these will be standardised across schools and colleges. For this reason, students’ final calculated grades will not necessarily reflect their predicted grades.

Will schools be using mock exam results as a barometer for results – and is this fair on students as they did not know at the time these would be used as their final mark?
Mock exam results will be one of the pieces of evidence that will be taken into account in this process, alongside other factors.

Will the past performance of the school be taken into account when devising the calculated grade?
Additional guidance from exam boards says that one of the sources of evidence schools and colleges should draw upon is the performance of this year’s students compared to those in previous years. However, this is only one of the sources of evidence that will be taken into account.

Is this an entirely new system?
This is a new system, but one which builds on existing practices, as education professionals are used to making holistic judgements about their students. These judgments will be standardised by exam boards that are regulated by external bodies such as Ofqual to give grades that are as fair as possible.

When will I get my results?
A, AS level and BTEC Level 3 results will be published on 13 August. Individual’s ‘I’ A level and ‘I’ AS results will be made available to students online from Cambridge Assessment (CIE) on the 11 August. Schools will provide student secure logins and passwords for access to these Cambridge Assessment (CIE) qualifications. Adhering to these previously published dates will enable progression to higher education to take place in the normal way.

IGCSE results will be made available to students online by Cambridge Assessment (CIE) on the 11 August. Schools will provide student secure logins and passwords for access to these Cambridge Assessment (CIE) qualifications. Remaining WJEC GCSE and other Level 1 / 2 qualifications will be available from schools on Thursday 20th August.

Schools and UCM staff and the DESC Careers team will be available to support progression of school leavers onto positive destinations such as further education or training.
Will universities, colleges and sixth forms accept these grades?
The calculated grades awarded this summer will be formal grades, with the same status as grades awarded in any other year. They will therefore be accepted by all institutions.

University representatives have already confirmed that they expect universities to do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to higher education.

What if I am unhappy with my calculated grade?
Exam boards and regulatory bodies such as Ofqual are working to ensure that candidates are awarded a fair grade that recognises the work they have put in.

If a Key Stage 4 or 5 student does not believe the correct process has been followed in their case they will be able to appeal on that basis.

In addition, if a student does not feel their grade reflects their performance, they will have the opportunity to sit an exam, as soon as is reasonably possible after schools and colleges open again. Students will also have the option to sit their exams in summer 2021, in line with usual practice.

What about private candidates or home educated students?
Where schools and colleges have accepted entries from external candidates (students who they have not taught themselves, because they have been home-schooled, following distance-learning programmes or studying independently), those students should be taken into account in the process of producing centre assessment grades where possible.

This will only be the case if the head teacher or principal is confident that they and their staff have seen sufficient evidence of the external candidate’s work to date to make an objective judgement on performance and to verify that any work submitted as evidence is the work of the external candidate. This is likely to be impossible in many cases because schools will not have had a relationship with private candidates that will enable them to quality assure any assessments undertaken by them outside their school setting.

Higher and further education providers may consider steps that they could take when making admissions decisions this summer for any private candidates who do not receive a grade. Institutions may consider a range of other evidence and information for these students to allow them to progress if possible.

Can private centres run Level 1, 2 or 3 external examinations if they chose to do so?
No. Exam boards will not be issuing papers for Summer 2020 exams so there will not be the opportunity to sit them at any centre.

Does this mean every exam in every module in every subject being cancelled, or will a limited number go ahead?
Exam boards will not be issuing papers for Summer 2020 exams so there will not be the opportunity to sit them in any subject.
What about vocational and technical qualifications?

We recognise that many students will be taking vocational or technical qualifications and our priority is to ensure that students and adult learners taking these qualifications can move on as planned to the next stage of their lives, including starting university, college or sixth form courses, apprenticeships in the autumn, getting a job or progressing in work.

As far as possible vocational and technical qualifications used for progression to higher and further education will be treated in a similar way to other qualifications, with students receiving a calculated result.

However, the complexity of the vocational and technical qualifications landscape means that a single approach is not appropriate. Some qualifications are primarily designed to support progression to or through employment. With some qualifications it might be appropriate to generate a calculated grade in line with the processes used by other exam boards whereas with others assessments will be adapted so that they can still take place even though centres have ceased classroom delivery.

Will students be required to do further work to contribute towards their grade?

There is no requirement for schools and colleges to set additional mock exams or homework tasks for the purposes of determining a centre assessment grade, and no student should be disadvantaged if they are unable to complete any work set after schools were closed.

Can schools and colleges take incomplete coursework into account?

Schools and colleges do not need to ask students to complete any unfinished non-exam assessment work for the purposes of grading. Where they do choose to take into account coursework completed after schools were closed head teachers and principals have been asked to exercise caution where that evidence suggests a change in performance. In many cases this is likely to reflect the circumstances and context in which the work is done.

What will young people with university offers do?

The grades awarded this summer will be formal grades, with the same status as grades awarded in any other year. There is no reason for the usual admissions cycle to be disrupted.

University representatives have already confirmed that they expect universities to do all they can to support students and ensure they can progress to higher education.

Do universities need to start making unconditional offers / should I accept an unconditional offer now that exams are cancelled?

Universities should not begin making new unconditional offers and applicants should feel no pressure to accept such offers, as they will be awarded a formal calculated grade for each exam they would have taken. Timeframes for acceptance of offers have also been changed by UCAS over recent weeks. If students are uncertain with any aspect of University admission they should contact their Head of KS5/Sixth Form at their own school for advice.
If I already have an unconditional offer, does that remain?
Yes. An unconditional offer means you have already met the entry requirements, so the place is yours if you want it. This will also be subject to you meeting requirements for funding by DESC student awards.

If I take the exam option, will I still be able to go to university this year?
Students who do not feel their calculated grade reflects their performance will have the opportunity to sit an exam as soon as is reasonably possible after the beginning of the new academic year.

The aim is for results to be awarded in the Autumn Term 2020 for most subjects.

Any student wanting to understand the implications on university admission of taking these autumn exams should speak to the university from which they have an offer after receiving their calculated grade in the summer.

How will colleges, sixth forms and universities cope with the fact that these students will have missed out on some of their education?
These are extraordinary circumstances. Governments, schools, sixth forms, colleges and universities are all working to try to ensure that everything is done to help students prepare for and progress to the next stage of their lives.

Might the exams be reinstated if the coronavirus (COVID-19) is not as bad as expected?
No. The decision has been taken to cancel all exams this summer.