

## Ofqual and DfE consultations on how grades should be awarded in summer 2021 – University Alliance Submission

### About us

University Alliance (UA) is the voice of professional and technical universities. We represent 12 large to mid-sized universities working at the heart of their communities. Alliance universities work with industry and the professions to deliver the workforce of today and tomorrow through practical, skills-based learning and applied research. Our members are:

- Anglia Ruskin University
- Birmingham City University
- University of Brighton
- Coventry University
- University of Greenwich
- University of Hertfordshire
- Kingston University
- Leeds Beckett University
- Oxford Brookes University
- University of South Wales
- Teesside University
- University of the West of England, Bristol

We welcome the opportunity to make a brief submission to the Ofqual and DfE consultations on [arrangements for awarding grades for GCSE, AS and A levels](#) and [awarding arrangements for a range of vocational and technical qualifications](#) in summer 2021 **focused on the proposed timeline for higher education admissions.**

### Our key concerns

Alliance universities accept that there will be significant changes to the admissions cycle in 2021-22 and are prepared to be as flexible as possible. **However, we are strongly opposed to the ‘decoupling’ aspects of the proposals** – i.e., students receiving provisional grades in July several weeks before higher education institutions (HEIs) receive confirmed grades.

Decoupling the issuing of results to students from the formal confirmation process for the purposes of university admissions would cause an extended period of uncertainty for students, creating anxiety for them and their families, as well as their schools/colleges. The ability of HEIs to provide advice and guidance to applicants during this period would be severely limited.

HEIs often accept applicants who either do not meet or exceed the academic entry requirements that form part of the condition of offer. Uncoupling the results from the

acceptance decision is highly likely to result in a greater number of appeals from these applicants, further increasing the strain on schools, colleges, and exam boards.

There are also significant risks that HEIs will come under considerable pressure to provide informal confirmation to students who have their provisional results. Maintaining a moratorium on confirmation would require regulatory measures, and Alliance universities' experience of implementing these during last summer's admissions cycle was that they are not well understood and cause significant confusion and concern by applicants and their families. Furthermore, any consequences of breaching a moratorium on confirmation would need to apply to HEIs outside of England to be effective.

## Core principles

Below we lay out three principles that we believe are necessary for a fair and effective higher education admissions cycle this year. In our view, these would benefit students, schools/colleges, and HEIs alike.

1. **Teaching should continue as long as possible through the academic year to ensure that the whole curriculum is covered, aiding students' preparedness for further study.** Content should therefore continue to be delivered during the exam period.
2. **As far as possible, the usual higher education admissions process and timetable and should be followed.** This means:
  - a. **Students should not be told their grade before Results Day or receive provisional grades before HEIs.**
  - b. **HEIs should receive embargoed results five to six days before students to allow for a thorough and equitable assessment of applicants as part of the confirmation process.** This is particularly important this year when the students who face the biggest barriers accessing higher education are also the most likely to have been affected by the pandemic. HEIs will need time to carefully consider contextual factors in a planned and organised manner. This will also ensure students are clear on the outcome of their applications and next steps.
  - c. **Results for AS and A levels and vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs) should be coordinated and released at the same time and include Access to Higher Education Diplomas.** Many applicants to Alliance universities are studying a mixed programme of qualifications, e.g., A-levels and BTECs. Any delay in the publication of results of different types of qualifications causes delays in confirmation and additional stress for applicants.

3. **Students, schools/colleges and HEIs need clarification on the model of assessment and associated timelines as soon as possible.** For HEIs, confirmation and clearing are significant operations which require months of detailed planning.

### Our preferred model

We understand **UCAS is proposing an alternative model** that envisages schools sending results to UCAS and HEIs in late July/early August, and Results Day taking place in early August. There is no 'decoupling' of results in this model. **We are fully supportive of these alternative proposals**, as they would minimise disruption to applicants who have achieved the grades required to enter their preferred HEI and provide them with certainty about the future. They would ensure that appeals are kept to a minimum and create less volatility in the higher education sector. Crucially, they would also allow three more weeks of teaching time.

We acknowledge the challenge of appeals needing to be facilitated by schools once again when they are traditionally closed and hope that government will provide support to enable them to do this.

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