



Exam results 2021: warning for students and families on tight appeal deadlines

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Anyone remembering the chaos surrounding A level and GCSE results last year will hope that this year does not see a repeat. With many students and their families going through uncertainty and anguish last year, some cases from 2020 still remain unresolved. It remains to be seen whether this year's regime is an improvement, despite the additional time for policymakers and schools to plan and fine-tune the marking arrangements.

Results day invariably creates political debate in any year. Concerns about the inflation of A level grades have already been voiced by universities and there will inevitably be individual students who feel that they have been treated unfairly by their school. As a lawyer who has worked with many affected families seeking to appeal GCSE or A level grades last year, the focus at this time of year is on the appeals process. This year there are tighter deadlines that students and their families need to be aware of. Timeframes have been moved forward to avoid disrupting the allocation of university places by ongoing appeals. 'Priority' reviews (where students have missed out on their 'firm' higher education choice) must be requested by 16 August from the school (a 'centre review'), and by 3 September for 'non-priority' cases. Individual schools can set earlier deadlines so it is important to double check.

After the centre review, stage 2 is a formal appeal to the exam board - which the school must submit on behalf of the student if requested to do so. The deadline for these is 23 August for 'priority' cases and 17 September for 'non-priority' cases. At this stage students will more likely want to work with their school in preparing the appeal submission. Finally, students can turn to the Exam Procedures Review Service (EPRS) who will check the exam board's appeal decision. Again, students need to approach the EPRS quickly, normally within three weeks from the exam board's decision. Unlike last year, this year an appeal is not without risk – the exam board can adjust grades upwards or downwards, or leave them unchanged.

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