The National Extension College release A level and GCSE results

Monday 24 August, 2020

"It was impossible to fulfil my dreams without my parent's and NEC's patience, support, motivation and 24/7 accessibility to my learning materials [sic] during my learning. NEC has equipped me to thrive and achieve higher grades to prove my true potential and determination to fulfil my future aspirations of being a heart physician." - Mohammed (studied 7 GCSEs with NEC)

GCSE and A level results this year have been extraordinary to say the least. With the coronavirus pandemic forcing the cancellation of the Summer 2020 exams, and a new assessment model put in place based on Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs) produced by teachers and moderated nationally through an Ofqual produced algorithm, which then had to be swiftly withdrawn in a major government U-turn to allow students to be awarded their original Centre Assessment Grade. In our 57 year history as an education provider, we can safely say that we had never experienced anything like it before.

While the attention around the grade moderation fiasco centred on the disproportionate downgrading of state schools compared to independent schools, thousands of private candidates faced their own set of unique disadvantages. Many private candidates, including second-chance learners and home-educated children, were unable to be entered for a Centre Assessment Grade (CAG) at all because they were not registered with an exam centre. As NEC is a registered exam centre, our students, who had submitted enough work to be assessed, received a CAG based on assessment by their tutor.

We found, as did many other schools and colleges, that the Ofqual moderation process for A levels had seriously disadvantaged some NEC students, with some dropping as many as three or four grades. Up until the government U-turn and switch to CAGs we had been engaging with the exam boards and working tirelessly to appeal grades on behalf of our students.

We of course welcomed the news that students would be awarded their grade based on their CAG and believe it to be a far fairer reflection of our students true ability. In order to produce these grades, tutors had to follow a strict process set by Ofqual and the awarding bodies which took into account evidence from a variety of sources, including non-examination assessments and tutor marked assignments. We are confident that our tutors assessed and moderated the students' work objectively and with great professionalism.

However, no assessment system can claim to be fair and just as some students are inevitably disappointed by their exam results, some students were disappointed in their Centre Assessment Grade and feel that the CAG does not reflect the grade they could have achieved if the 2020 exams had gone ahead. We of course sympathise with these students and are doing all we can to advise based on the guidance we have received. We have set up a dedicated 2020 exams page, which we will update with the latest information as and when we receive it. This includes information on the Autumn sessions and preparation for the 2021 exams.

A level and GCSE results

The cancellation of the 2020 Summer exams was unprecedented and therefore, in many ways, this year's results cannot be compared directly to previous years. When it was first announced at the end of March that the exams were cancelled, NEC students intending to sit the Summer 2020 exams had two choices, the option of receiving a Centre Assessment Grade from their tutor providing they had submitted sufficient work for assessment up to that point, or defer until the Autumn exam sitting. The following results should be viewed within the context of this extraordinary circumstance.

In the academic year 2019/20, nearly 500 students received results in GCSEs and A levels with online and distance learning provider, the National Extension College (NEC). As well as providing high quality courses in 20 A level and 16 GCSE subjects, NEC is an approved exam centre able to provide Centre Assessment Grades (CAGs), and in 'normal' years, an exam booking service, for their students.

NEC's student body is diverse. As well as catering for home-educated and younger students sitting their exams for the first time, many of our students are second-chance learners. These students have taken the plunge to try again, often having overcome a lot of adversity to get to that stage. The challenges that some NEC students face are rarely simple or uniform, ranging from health issues and family and work commitments that make traditional classroom attendance impossible, to living abroad and needing a

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specific qualification for a career change. NEC is proud to facilitate and support such determined individuals through their independent learning journey.

“NEC has deepened my interest in the subjects that I have studied and given me independent learning skills. It was a great pleasure to work with all my tutors, the feedback and advice that they gave me were very important to me. I also want to thank the student support team who helped me with a lot of issues, including my university application.” - Timofei (studied 4 A levels with NEC)

Despite the challenging circumstances that many of our students face, through online distance learning with NEC, many of those who were eligible to receive a CAG achieved results that surpass those in the mainstream education system. NEC students have beaten national trends across the board. Nationally, in 2020, 78% of A level results were at a grade C or above (education datalab, 2020). NEC is proud to have beaten the national average, as 93% of NEC A level students achieved a grade C or above. Similarly, top grades in GCSEs for NEC students are better than the national rate, as 27.6% of all students achieved a grade 7 or above (education datalab, 2020), compared to 49.5% of NEC students. In the core GCSE subjects of English and maths, we performed consistently above national average. Nationally, 81% of students achieved a passing grade of 4 or above in GCSE English Language (education datalab, 2020), while 100% of NEC students achieved a grade 4 or above, an improvement from 59.5% in 2019.

Across all 20 A Level subjects and most GCSE subjects, NEC achieved an 100% pass rate. A level Religious Studies stands out in particular, where 85% of NEC students achieved an A* or A, compared to the national rate of A* and A grades stands at 27.6% (education datalab, 2020). Similarly, 100% of NEC students achieved the top grades of 9-7 in modern foreign language GCSEs.

2020 has been a unique year in education, as A level and GCSE exams have never been cancelled before, continuing even through the Second World War (Cambridge Assessment, 2020). Combined with the challenging circumstances many NEC students already face, the achievements of our students are outstanding and testament to their hard work, determination and strength in the face of adversity. Many of our students have plans to go on to further and higher education and we wish them all the best of luck.

Learner case studies

Laura - A level Chemistry: Laura studied A level Chemistry with NEC, as well as some Open University modules, after struggling with her health. Laura obtained an A* in chemistry and has been accepted to read Natural Sciences at Hughes Hall, University of Cambridge in October.

Belinda - GCSE Astronomy and Maths: Belinda is a mature student who returned to education after raising her children. She achieved the top grade of 9 in both astronomy and maths and is beginning a Natural Sciences degree with the Open University in October.

Hannah - A level Sociology and Spanish: Hannah studied A levels with NEC from Spain after deciding the Spanish system no longer suited her educational and health needs. She achieved an A* in Spanish and a B in sociology and plans to study a social work degree.

Congratulations from our Chief Executive

Congratulating NEC students on their A level and GCSE results, NEC Chief Executive Dr Ros Morpeth OBE said: “I am very proud of all our students and congratulate each one of them for their achievements. 2020 has been a year like no other in our 57 year history. As a registered exam centre NEC, unlike many online providers, was in the unique position to be able to provide Centre Assessment Grades (CAG) to our students. We are full of admiration for the positive ways our students, tutors and staff responded to this new situation.”

Company Contact:

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The National Extension College (Part of the Open School Trust)

T. 0800 389 2839
E. marketing@nec.ac.uk
W. https://www.nec.ac.uk/

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