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Sent via email to:
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Dear Des and Ben,

Further to my email on A-level results day, I am writing on behalf of AoBSO, BSME, COBIS and HMC following the publication of results for students at British international schools across the Middle East.

First and importantly, the overall picture appears positive. Following an exceptionally challenging examination period, the significant majority of students have received their results and progressed successfully to their intended next steps. We recognise the considerable work undertaken by regulators, awarding organisations, schools, universities and UCAS to support students through these exceptional circumstances.

However, a small number of cases have been brought to the attention of our associations which we believe warrant further examination. Representatives of our associations raised these concerns with Ofqual on 13 August and subsequently with Pearson on 17 August.

These discussions also follow our correspondence with UCAS on 2 June, when we sought your support in helping to ensure that students affected by the disruption would not be disadvantaged in higher education admissions. At that stage, we highlighted the potential for real or perceived inequity arising from the different qualification and assessment routes being introduced, and the importance of ensuring that awarded grades would be recognised and university progression protected.

We remain extremely grateful for the action UCAS took in response, including convening the webinar with awarding organisations for 79 higher education providers, highlighting Sir Steve Smith's letter, sharing information through the Provider Bulletin and making the letter and associated guidance available through the UCAS Middle East exam disruption webpage. This was an important and practical contribution to ensuring that admissions teams understood the exceptional circumstances facing students in the region.

Against that broadly positive backdrop, the individual cases now being reported raise some specific concerns about the calculation and consistency of certain grades and, importantly, the consequences for university admissions.

Schools have reported a small number of students receiving outcomes below those anticipated from the evidence available, across both regulated qualifications and international qualifications used through alternative or 'mirror qualification' routes. Questions have also been raised about aspects of the statistical methodology used for special consideration and whether, in some cases, outcomes at the highest levels of attainment are sufficiently representative and comparable with previous cohorts.

Our particular concern in writing to UCAS is where these circumstances have affected student progression. We are aware of individual cases where students have lost, or had changes made to, university offers, including at highly selective institutions. We are also aware of a case where an incorrect grade was initially transmitted to a university, meaning that the institution's original admissions decision was not based on the student's actual results.

We appreciate that admissions decisions ultimately rest with individual universities. Nevertheless, we would be grateful for UCAS' continued support in making representation across the UK higher education sector so that institutions:

- Understand the exceptional circumstances affecting this cohort of students in the Middle East and the different assessment routes that have been applied
- Consider affected applicants contextually and flexibly, particularly where a student has narrowly missed an offer or where a grade is subject to review
- Ensure that students are not disadvantaged as a consequence of circumstances beyond their control, including differences arising from the qualification or awarding route used
- Where results are corrected following an awarding-body error or review, reconsider admissions decisions wherever practicable on the basis of the corrected information

Our concern is not to seek preferential treatment for students from British international schools, nor to suggest that the issues identified are widespread. Rather, it is to ensure equitable treatment for those students who have been affected and that the exceptional circumstances surrounding this examination series are properly understood when universities make admissions and confirmation decisions.

We would also welcome UCAS' perspective on whether the cases being reported to us are reflected in anything UCAS is seeing more widely, and whether further representation to universities, UUK, UUKi or other relevant stakeholders would be helpful.

AoBSO, BSME, COBIS and HMC remain available to provide further details and anonymised examples from schools where these would assist UCAS and the wider sector in examining these cases.

Thank you again for UCAS' continued engagement and practical support throughout this period. While we are encouraged to believe that the overall picture is positive, our collective objective remains that no student should be disadvantaged by circumstances beyond their control. The continued UCAS voice, alongside our associations, in helping to uphold that principle is greatly appreciated.

With best wishes,
Colin

On behalf of AoBSO, BSME, COBIS and HMC



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