Joint Association briefing for Schools in the Middle East following the awarding of results for the Summer 2026 examinations

Issued by AoBSO, BSME, COBIS and HMC

Following our Joint Association update to schools issued on 30 March 2026, we are providing a summary of our collective engagement with awarding bodies and regulators since then. Throughout the disruption caused by conflict and military action in the Gulf region, HMC, COBIS, BSME and AoBSO have worked closely together to provide a coordinated voice for affected schools and their students.

Following Ofqual's decision not to allow assessment via a portfolio of evidence for UK-regulated examinations, our early work focused on ensuring that all students had a pathway to qualification, with examination boards creating new international specifications to facilitate this where needed. During the evidence-gathering stage, we also supported schools with requests for extensions to deadlines.

Our collaboration has continued following the publication of Summer 2026 A level and GCSE results, with the four associations sharing intelligence from member schools, identifying common concerns and representing these collectively to regulators, awarding organisations and the higher education sector.

It is important to recognise that, despite the exceptional circumstances and significant challenges faced by pupils, teachers and schools across the region, the overall picture has been very positive. Many schools have reported very strong examination results, reflecting the resilience and commitment of students and staff during an extraordinarily difficult period. The concerns raised by the associations on behalf of our members therefore relate not to the overall performance of schools, or the examination series as a whole, but to specific outcomes and apparent anomalies which merit further scrutiny.

The associations maintained close contact with Ofqual throughout the period and met with the regulator on both A level and GCSE results days, enabling concerns emerging from schools to be raised immediately. Subsequent discussions with Ofqual and awarding organisations have focused in particular on significant inconsistencies in some examination outcomes, the interpretation and application of z-scores, and whether the methodologies used to assess evidence submitted under the exceptional arrangements have ultimately proved fit for purpose in our specific context.

Where patterns of concern have emerged, the associations have sought to ensure that these are considered not simply as a series of individual candidate cases, but also in terms of whether they might indicate wider or systemic issues. This has included specific and continued representations with senior colleagues at Pearson International, AQA, Cambridge OCR and Oxford AQA.

Recognising the potential implications for students progressing to UK universities, the associations have also engaged with UCAS, Universities UK (UUK) and Universities UK International (UUKi). While the overall picture for progression to UK higher education has been reassuring, where individual cases of significant concern have been highlighted, the associations have sought to support schools and pupils who have encountered difficulties.

A particular strength of this work has been the way in which evidence and concerns reported through any one of the four associations have been shared appropriately, avoiding unnecessary duplication for schools and enabling us to present a stronger collective evidence base and a consistent voice on behalf of the sector. Our shared priority throughout has been to represent the interests of affected schools and, above all, to ensure that candidates are treated fairly and are not disadvantaged as a consequence of circumstances entirely beyond their control.

Our Joint Association Approach

This work remains ongoing. We recognise the complexity of the situation and the efforts made at the time by the awarding bodies to minimise disruption, with the promise of fair outcomes for students. However, global geopolitical uncertainty and volatility remain, both in the Middle East and in other parts of the world. These risks present the potential for future disruption to student learning and teaching activities and, of course, to future examination series.

Whilst our discussions with Ofqual, the awarding bodies, UCAS, UUK, UUKi and JCQ have specifically highlighted examination issues during the 2025/26 academic year, our work has also focused on how all of these organisations manage and respond to any similar disruption in the future. A key component of our work is to ensure that awarding bodies and others reflect on lessons learned and are transparent about how improvements will be made.

Members are very welcome to continue to update the associations on any significant ongoing challenges relating to the Summer 2026 series, including where satisfactory outcomes have since been achieved.

We are very grateful to all who have supported pupils and their families during this challenging time. Collectively, we wish to assure our members of our unfaltering commitment to the wellbeing of pupils, staff and school communities, and to continuing to represent our members and the wider sector.

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