

Dear Colleague,

I hope you are well in these challenging times. Yesterday, Qualifications Wales [announced its approach](#) to exam grading for 2023. Results are to be broadly based on a 'midpoint' between 2019 and 2022, with students to be given advance information to help with their exam preparation. Qualifications Wales says this 'signals the next steps' in a return to pre-pandemic standards in 2024.

In light of this announcement, and with the deadline for courses at Oxford, Cambridge and in medicine, dentistry and veterinary science approaching on 15 October, you may want to consider the following when supporting students in exploring their options – whether pursuing university, college or an apprenticeship.

A 'supportive approach' to grading

This brings clarity for students, schools, universities and colleges about assessment arrangements in Wales for 2023. Students now know how they will be assessed, which should give them confidence when applying to university or college.

This guidance gives teachers and advisers assurance when issuing predicated grades to your students, and help you give them the best guidance during their application journey.

For universities and colleges, it provides understanding of how grades will be arrived at. Education is a devolved matter, with A Levels being structurally different across the UK with differing approaches to assessment. Universities and colleges are used to managing these differences, and will continue to be pragmatic and flexible in their offer-making.

How to advise your students in the changing environment

We are seeing an increasingly competitive environment which we expect to continue throughout the remainder of the decade, with UCAS forecasting up to one million applicants in 2026.

The increase in competition over this period may mean you wish to reflect on the advice you give to some students. Below are some considerations you may want to take into account:

- Students have five initial choices when applying to traditional higher education options via UCAS. We would always encourage students to be aspirational in their choices, but to also think carefully about the spread of choices they make, considering a range of courses above, at and below their predicted grades.
- UCAS is here to support students with the full range of post-secondary choices, with the UCAS Hub offering personalised information and advice. We know more than half of students interested in undergraduate courses are also interested in apprenticeships – and [ucas.com](#) currently lists thousands of opportunities for students to explore, side by side their undergraduate options.

- As always, the personal statement and reference provide opportunities to share information about the student as an individual, along with their achievements. This cycle, we have introduced a range of new questions for specific groups of students, such as carers and estranged students, to better support them as they progress to higher education.
- The UCAS cycle is flexible, and supports students in changing or revisiting their choices. UCAS Extra allows students to add additional choices, and Clearing continues to offer a range of choice to students. In addition, we are further supporting students in Clearing through our Clearing Plus service, which provides students with personalised suggested courses.

Throughout the pandemic, universities and colleges have sought to maintain the interest of those from the most disadvantaged backgrounds, and we have seen the number of these students entering higher education increase, as well as a narrowing of the gap between the most and least advantaged. We expect universities and colleges will continue to maintain this focus.

UCAS tools and resources to support you

UCAS is here to help you support students in every step of their decision-making journey, whether they decide to pursue an undergraduate course or apprenticeship. We have a wealth of available resources, such as:

- Our [historic entry grades tool](#) – shows the grades students held when they were accepted on to courses during 2017-2019, giving insight into how different universities approach entry requirements.
- the [UCAS Hub](#) – mentioned above, this offers students personalised information and accessible tools all in one place to guide them through every step of their journey. For example, students can use our personal statement builder, or view employer profiles to understand apprenticeship opportunities.
- [Careers Quiz](#) – students continue to have plenty of choice when searching for courses and making their applications, with more than 30,000 courses available each year on [ucas.com](#). Our Careers Quiz supports students in refining these choices, guiding them towards potential areas of interest.
- [events and exhibitions](#) – where students can explore a wide range of academic and career opportunities.

While these changes apply to Wales, we look forward to working with other nations on grading standards. As always, we'll continue to support you throughout the cycle, and please contact us if you have any questions.

- **Clare Marchant, Chief Executive, UCAS**