

Professor Julia Buckingham CBE

Chair

Universities UK

16 August 2020

Dear Professor Buckingham

We write to issue a plea on behalf of the United Kingdom's young people to ask all UK Universities to be highly flexible in the unique circumstances of the Coronavirus Pandemic and to honour the offers of a place they have already made to prospective domestic students prior to Higher, Advanced Higher, A-level and equivalent qualifications results in 2020.

As independent commissioners our role is to ensure that children and young people's human rights are protected in our respective jurisdictions. The rights to an education and to fair and equal treatment have been severely compromised this year.

The cancellation of exams was understandable due to the sudden and severe nature of the pandemic, and the cessation of all but on-line teaching which would have provided an unstable and unequal platform for students to sit their examinations through distant methods. We believe that the UK and devolved governments have set out to implement a method of determining results that would attempt to replicate the patterns of previous years and bring a reasonable set of results to our exam candidates. However, this attempt has led to too many individual anomalies and an acute sense of hopelessness and frustration by individual students who have not had the opportunity to complete their education and sit the exams. We have been very concerned to hear from candidates who have now been rejected by universities on the basis of results which appear not to reflect their ability and anticipated attainment. Appeals systems will likely favour students with the support of confident and well-resourced families, schools and colleges. Each UK government has used different methods and made different decisions in the last few days which will also provide inequalities between students in different UK nations.

We believe that our universities must now provide for this cohort of young people an exceptional response to exceptional times. University offers will have been made on the basis of individual statements, previous achievements, references, predicted grades and in some cases entrance exams and interviews. Many students have had little chance to progress their education since those offers were made. It is unfair to now reject individuals whose results have been arrived at by a system that is likely to have produced individual anomalies.



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The impact of the decisions made by universities now will have life-long consequences for this generation of young people. We strongly urge universities to respond with generosity of spirit and to warmly welcome all students who hold conditional offers for their institution.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales

Anne Longfield OBE, Children's Commissioner for England

Bruce Adamson, Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland

Koulla Yiasouma, Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People

