



Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

M.T. Burke
Assistant Coroner, West Yorkshire – Western Division
City Courts
The Tyrls
Bradford
BD1 1LA

14th September 2019

Thank you for sharing with me your Regulation 28 report into the death of Owen Arron Wynne Williams in August 2018. I was deeply saddened to read of Mr Williams' death and would like to express my sincere condolences to his family. I have read and carefully considered the important matters of concern that you raise, and what my department, in conjunction with others, can do to help prevent any future tragic deaths in similar circumstances.

Exams are an essential part of ensuring that young people have acquired the knowledge and skills they need and supporting their progression into further study and work, but I am clear that this should not come at the expense of their wellbeing. Schools and colleges are best placed to understand the needs of their students and I expect them to offer comprehensive support as exam results are issued.

I am determined that we avoid any situations where students with unexpected results feel that they have nowhere to turn. In order to ensure that no pupil finds themselves in this situation, later this year, my department will be jointly hosting a roundtable with UCAS, who are responsible for the release of information about university places on the morning of A level results day. We will invite organisations from across the education sector to consider the student journey – from sitting exams to receiving results – to agree how, together, we can ensure that pupils are supported should they encounter difficulties. Attendees will include the JCQ (Joint Council of Qualifications) and the Sixth Form Colleges Association (SFCA). I understand that UCAS and the SFCA will be responding to you separately.

The time at which GCSE, AS and A level results can be released by schools to pupils is a matter for the JCQ, a membership organisation representing independent awarding organisations including the four exam boards offering GCSE, AS and A level exams in England. The JCQ oversees exam processes

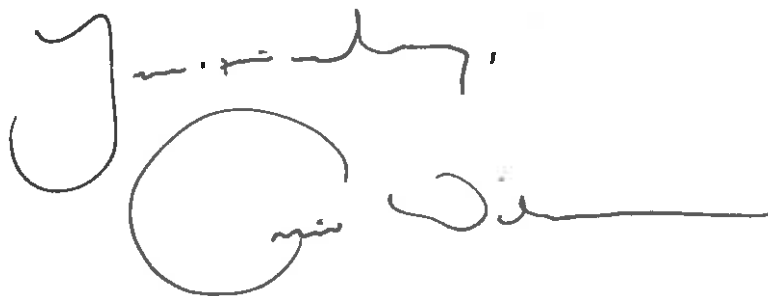
and results announcements for these qualifications; for other qualifications, the release of results is a matter for the individual awarding organisation.

My officials are in contact with JCQ about this matter and we understand that they are considering changes which will mean that young people are best supported during what can be a difficult period for some. Currently, JCQ lift the embargo on results at 6am, at which time they can be issued by exam centres (schools and colleges) to students. JCQ is reviewing the possibility of a later embargo to reduce the likelihood that students will receive results without support available. In addition, JCQ is planning improvements to its guidance, including considering whether to recommend that students pick up results from their schools or college directly.

I recognise that young people and their parents need extra support at what can be a challenging time which is why the government funds the delivery of the Exam Results Helpline. The helpline is open for two weeks following the release of A level and GCSE results. It gives young people, parents and carers access to independent, professional careers advisers who can help them talk through all their options and make a decision about their future. This year the helpline worked with Mental Health UK to improve the service provided to young people around this stressful time.

I can assure you that I am committed to improving student wellbeing and to fostering collaboration across the education sector to learn lessons from this tragic death, ensuring that students receiving exam results are given appropriate support by all parties concerned. I hope that you, and Mr Williams' family, will be assured that I take the matter of student wellbeing incredibly seriously and expect to see clear action taken in order that students sitting their exams are given the support they need.

Thank you for raising this important matter.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gavin Williamson', written in a cursive style.

Rt Hon Gavin Williamson CBE MP
Secretary of State for Education