The exams process - a guide

This document is a guide to how to go about booking and taking exams.

Finding an exam centre

As an external (private) candidate, you take GCSEs, IGCSEs and A-levels at an exam centre approved by the relevant board, which may be a school or a private exam centre specifically catering to external candidates. A popular choice is Tutors and Exams who have centres in various locations across the UK. Private candidates deal with the exam centre, not the exam board. The exam boards do not take entries directly. Different exam centres offer exams for different boards and some offer several boards so check that your chosen centre can accommodate the board/s you are interested in.

The main exam boards are: Edexcel AQA CIE OCR WJEC/Eduqas

To help you locate centres, here's a list of most of the exam centres that take private candidates, although the list is not exhaustive and it's a good idea to check online and ring round centres near you.

https://www.jcq.org.uk/private-candidates/

Once registered for the relevant board, you sit the exam under exam conditions, at the published time of the exam, usually alongside other candidates.

If your child might need extra time or help to enable them to sit exams, start reading up on Access Arrangements at least a year before you plan to sit exams.

It is best to try to register with an exam centre at least six months before the exams are due.

Booking Exams

Once you have decided on board and the syllabus you wish to follow and are ready to book the exams you will need to make your entries with the exams officer at your chosen exam centre. For this you will need to supply the relevant exam codes. These can be found on or in the exam syllabus from the exam board - you need to be very specific and get these details exactly right with your exam centre. The syllabi are available to download from the exam board website. You will also need to provide your child's full name, date of birth and candidate identification number if you already have one.

Email the exams officer, giving the exam code and date, your child's full name and date of birth, and a candidate identification number if you already have one. Students are required to have acceptable photographic proof of ID to register with the exam centre. JCQ rules specify

that the exams officer must see photo ID for private candidates. Students will need to bring this photo ID to every exam.

Check the exam dates

Exam timetables are published on the exam board websites detailing all the dates and times of the exams approximately six months in advance of the exams.

The exams officer will usually send you a Statement of Entry which shows the codes for all the exams entered. Check it carefully for errors of any kind – errors on exam codes, times, child's name, etc. If there are errors, send amendments via email and ensure you get confirmation and a new Statement.

May/June Exams:

Contact with your exam centre as early as possible (June through October). The usual exam entry deadline is in December or January, for May/June exams. If you miss this deadline you are not guaranteed a place and if places are available, you may incur late fees.

Aim to register with an exam centre at least six months before the exam date. Make sure you are clear on the centre fees, admission deadlines and processes. Most exam centres want a firm commitment and payment 4-5 months in advance of the exam date. Although it is theoretically possible to enter much later, even up to a week before the exam, but exam board fees increase sharply for late entries.

Exam fees consist of the exam board entry fee (between £30 and £50) plus an administration fee for the exam centre. Schools are under no obligation to accept private candidates; it creates extra work and may involve some disruption to their schedule. A school that accepted candidates last year may not accept them this year. Often, independent schools / colleges may be your best option for a centre near you. Private, or independent, exam centres are businesses which specialise in organising exams for external candidates. They are not schools, but are often tutorial colleges offering intensive or after-school tuition. Private candidates arrange exam centres themselves taking into account travel distance, access arrangements, room arrangements, fees and any other private information relevant to your needs.

Exam results

Your exam centre will inform you regarding how and when you can access your results. Some Exams Officers email them, others require you to collect in person, others will post them on to you (usually at an additional cost), other places will provide online login details to get the results etc. All results are 'available' for all candidates, across the UK, on the same 'results' day, which are published every year by Ofqual/the exam boards.

Free resources: webinars and podcasts on taking exams, studying English and revision and exam preparation

I have held various free webinars and podcasts which you can access below.

A webinar covering everything you need to know about the exams process including how to go about sitting exams, choosing exam boards, exam centres, exam specifications and IGCSEs vs GCSEs is available to view in the Facebook Exams information and advice group I run:

https://www.facebook.com/share/p/LokxpbL2NbBrYR6R/

This is also available as a podcast here:

https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-rubgi-132df4a

You will also find information relevant for other subjects in this group.

Effective exam revision and exam preparation:

This deep dive into effective revision and exam preparation is a must-listen and covers:

* Getting started with revision and planning for exams
* Effective revision and maximising your time
* Understanding exam questions and command words
*Exam technique and time management strategies
* Preparing for exam day
* Useful resources

You can listen to our podcast via Podbean or on YouTube. Links below:

https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-h5k2i-1562f83

and

https://youtu.be/B3BgCdDXPl0?si=BVXB61HUYGphI6vV

A guide to studying English and the Cambridge iGCSE English Language specification

Here's a link to a recording I held focusing on how to go about studying for the English Language iGCSE exams with a focus on the Cambridge iGCSE English Language syllabus, (0500 & 0990 specifications).

https://www.facebook.com/groups/heexamsinfoandadvice/permalink/1042068719811773/

This recording is also available as a podcast in the Home Education Matters series.

English Language IGCSE - Cambridge - with Iram Malik

https://www.podbean.com/ew/pb-64bth-14c597d