# Despite hard work, GCSE results still risk closing doors for talented students



This year, six students of mine prepared for their GCSE exams, and despite their dedication and hard work, I know they will not all achieve a grade of 5 or above. This reality fills me with concern, particularly as I reflect on their character and potential. These are diligent, focused teens who would undoubtedly prove valuable assets to any employer. However, when faced with less than stellar results—especially in core subjects like English Language and Literature—it’s disheartening to consider how their applications might be discarded without a second glance.

Among my students are four young Ukrainians, navigating the complexities of a new life while escaping a war-torn homeland. For them, parsing metaphors and comprehending nuanced literary meanings in a non-native language is a formidable challenge, compounded by the trauma of displacement. The implications of failing these examinations are not merely academic; such failures can unjustly label them as stupid, lazy, or unreliable—judgments that have far-reaching consequences in the job market.

Research supports the notion that GCSE results play a pivotal role in shaping future opportunities. A study conducted by the University of York and Leeds University demonstrated a correlation between GCSE performance and various life outcomes—like job status, income, and overall wellbeing—particularly highlighting the struggles faced by students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Good GCSE grades can help to alleviate the burdens of familial disadvantage, creating pathways to improved futures.

Moreover, findings from research carried out by Exeter University and University College London revealed that students who achieve poor marks in foundational subjects, namely English and maths, are statistically more likely to encounter adverse life consequences, ranging from health issues to increased chances of criminal behaviour. The pressure to secure at least a grade of 4 in these core subjects underscores the critical role that these qualifications play in one's life trajectory.

Employers often rely on GCSE results as a primary metric for assessing candidates. While these qualifications are essential for accessing further education and vocational pathways—such as apprenticeships—the unyielding emphasis on grades can inadvertently suppress the potential of capable individuals who may not perform well under the pressures of examination environments. A recent article highlighted that many employers factor GCSE grades into their shortlisting processes, recognising their significance in determining suitability for roles, particularly within administrative fields.

Yet, as the job market evolves, so too should our understanding of what constitutes a qualified candidate. Employers may be overlooking gifted individuals due to rigid grading systems that fail to account for personal circumstances such as language barriers or anxiety—which can severely affect performance. The current provision for applying adjustments to examination outcomes generally caters to "unforeseen circumstances" such as temporary illness, excluding conditions that might severely impact a student’s performance despite their ability. Some reforms could consider a 'certificate of mitigating circumstances' to complement GCSE results, providing insight into candidates' personal challenges and strengths.

The challenge remains: how do we reconcile the need for objective measures while ensuring that we don’t dismiss the potential of those who may shine in ability but falter in the exam room? It’s crucial that we not only educate our students but advocate for a system that fairly represents their capabilities. Perhaps it's time for educational institutions and employers alike to rethink how they assess talent, recognising that exam results, while important, do not paint the full picture of a candidate's worth.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25188423.gcse-exams-bad-grades-shouldnt-mean-lack-jobs/?ref=rss), [[4]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/careers-do-employers-really-care-about-gcse-grades)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2024/research/exam-results-impact/), [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/english-gcses-teenagers-england-bridget-phillipson-b2599253.html), [[5]](https://careermap.co.uk/career-advice/school-leavers/will-gcse-results-affect-my-future-education-and-career-prospects)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/careers-do-employers-really-care-about-gcse-grades), [[6]](https://www.icover.org.uk/gcses-on-cv/)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/english-gcses-teenagers-england-bridget-phillipson-b2599253.html), [[7]](https://successatschool.org/advice/education-blog/how-important-are-gcses/525)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25188423.gcse-exams-bad-grades-shouldnt-mean-lack-jobs/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2024/research/exam-results-impact/), [[4]](https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/careers-do-employers-really-care-about-gcse-grades)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25188423.gcse-exams-bad-grades-shouldnt-mean-lack-jobs/?ref=rss), [[2]](https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2024/research/exam-results-impact/), [[5]](https://careermap.co.uk/career-advice/school-leavers/will-gcse-results-affect-my-future-education-and-career-prospects)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.edp24.co.uk/news/25188423.gcse-exams-bad-grades-shouldnt-mean-lack-jobs/?ref=rss> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2024/research/exam-results-impact/> - A study by the University of York and Leeds University indicates that GCSE results significantly influence various aspects of life at 23, including job status, income, and wellbeing. The research highlights that good grades are particularly crucial for individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, suggesting that strong GCSE performance can help mitigate familial disadvantages and lead to better life outcomes.
3. <https://www.the-independent.com/news/uk/english-gcses-teenagers-england-bridget-phillipson-b2599253.html> - Research from Exeter University and University College London reveals that teenagers who perform poorly in core GCSEs, especially English and maths, are more likely to face adverse outcomes such as health issues and involvement in criminal behaviour. The study underscores the importance of achieving at least a grade 4 in these subjects to avoid negative life consequences.
4. <https://www.tes.com/magazine/archive/careers-do-employers-really-care-about-gcse-grades> - An article from Tes Magazine discusses the significance of GCSE grades in the job market. While acknowledging that GCSEs are crucial for further education, the piece notes that many employers also consider these grades when shortlisting candidates. It highlights that certain administrative roles may require specific GCSE grades, and that GCSEs can influence entry into apprenticeships and other career paths.
5. <https://careermap.co.uk/career-advice/school-leavers/will-gcse-results-affect-my-future-education-and-career-prospects> - Careermap outlines how GCSE results can impact future education and career prospects. The article explains that GCSE grades can determine sixth form choices, university eligibility, and career opportunities. It also offers guidance on alternative routes, such as vocational courses and apprenticeships, for those who may not achieve the desired GCSE grades.
6. <https://www.icover.org.uk/gcses-on-cv/> - This article from iCover discusses the importance of including GCSE grades on a CV. It advises against listing poor A-Level grades and suggests focusing on strengths and recent accomplishments. The piece also highlights that while GCSE grades are important, they should not overshadow more recent qualifications and work experience.
7. <https://successatschool.org/advice/education-blog/how-important-are-gcses/525> - Success at School explores the importance of GCSEs in the context of career prospects. The article notes that while GCSEs are crucial for accessing further education and certain career paths, their significance diminishes over time as individuals gain more experience and qualifications. It also discusses how GCSEs can influence university admissions and apprenticeship opportunities.