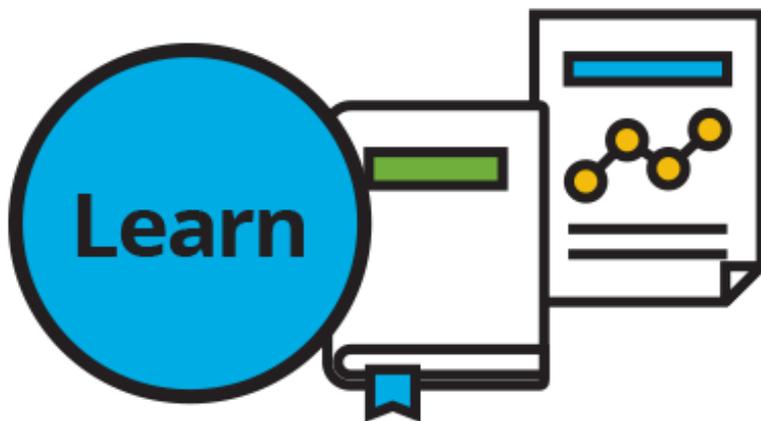


Your Guide to Exams



**For students entering for GCSE, IGCSE or
A level exams as a private candidate in 2019.**

Your Guide to Exams

For students entering for GCSE, IGCSE or A level exams as a private candidate in 2019.

The UK GCSE and A level exam system is designed for students who are sitting their exams through a traditional school or college. The system can accommodate students who are entering the exams independently as private candidates but it is not always a straightforward process.

It can be particularly difficult to find an exam centre for subjects that have NEA (for example assessed coursework) or for students who have special needs (for example need a computer for the exam).

NEC has put this handbook together for all students who are planning to enter exams as private candidates. The more you know and understand about the system and how it works, the better you can navigate it and get the best outcome for you.

At NEC we have put a lot of work into building a seamless exam booking service for students who are enrolled with us. We can do this because we are an exam centre in our own right and we work with a network of partnership exam centres across the country. Unfortunately, we can only offer this exam service to NEC students.

We have prepared this handbook to give you as much information as possible and provide help and advice for those students who are entering for the exams directly.

We hope this handbook is useful and if you spot any areas that are missed or could be improved for the next edition, do let us know.

Contents

Introduction	5
Taking your exams: your choices	6
NEC's unique examination entry service	7
Exam fees	8
Entry deadlines	9
Access arrangements	9
NEC partnership exam centres	10
What our students say about taking their exams through NEC's partnership exam centres	11
Non-examination assessments (NEAs)	12
Oral exams (modern foreign languages)	13
Spoken language endorsement (GCSE English Language)	13
Science practical endorsements	14
What is the practical endorsement?	14
The NEC programme for the practical endorsement	15
How to enter for the practical endorsement?	15
Overseas students	17
Preparing for exams	18
How NEC prepare you for your exams	18
What you can do yourself to prepare for your exam	19

Your Guide to Exams

For students entering for GCSE, IGCSE or A level exams as a private candidate in 2019.

Things to bear in mind for exam day	20
Exam pass guarantee	20
NEC exam results in 2017	21
GCSE and IGCSE results	21
A level results	22
Organising your own exams	24
What you will need to do if you decide to organise your own exams	24
Booking your exams if you are organising them yourself	25
NEC as a campaigner	26
Further sources of information	26

If you are an NEC student and opt to take a place at one of our partnership exam centres, our student support team can arrange and do all the exam entry administration for you.

Introduction

At NEC we've been providing life-changing distance learning to young people and adults for over 50 years. During that time, we've seen many times how someone's life can be transformed by taking the right course at the right time. Some of our students need qualifications to go on to further or higher education. Some plan to take professional courses in areas such as teaching or healthcare and just need that essential GCSE or A level to make it happen. Some choose to study for their own interest and enjoyment.

The right course at the right time can change your life.

This **Guide to Exams** is for students planning to enter for **GCSE, IGCSE or A level exams in the UK as a private candidate in 2019**. Exams are strictly controlled and can only be sat at registered exam centres on dates specified by the awarding organisation.

Locating an exam centre and ensuring that you are entered correctly for the exam you plan to take can be stressful. NEC can offer a guaranteed exam place for our students at one of our partnership exam centres across England, and if you wish to sit an exam at one of these centres our student support team can arrange this for you. Alternatively, you can find your own exam centre.

As an approved exam centre, NEC is able to cover all types of exams, including written exams, oral exams, coursework/non-examination assessments, plus practical endorsements and spoken language endorsements through a number of our partnership exam centres. We also offer an *exam pass guarantee* to our students (terms and conditions apply, see page 20), and NEC students consistently perform as well as or better in exams than national outcomes.

Once you have read through this guide, if you have any questions or want to find out more about booking exams or non-examination assessment (NEA) with NEC, contact our team who will be happy to help you make the right choices. Call us on **0800 389 2839** or email **student.support@nec.ac.uk**.



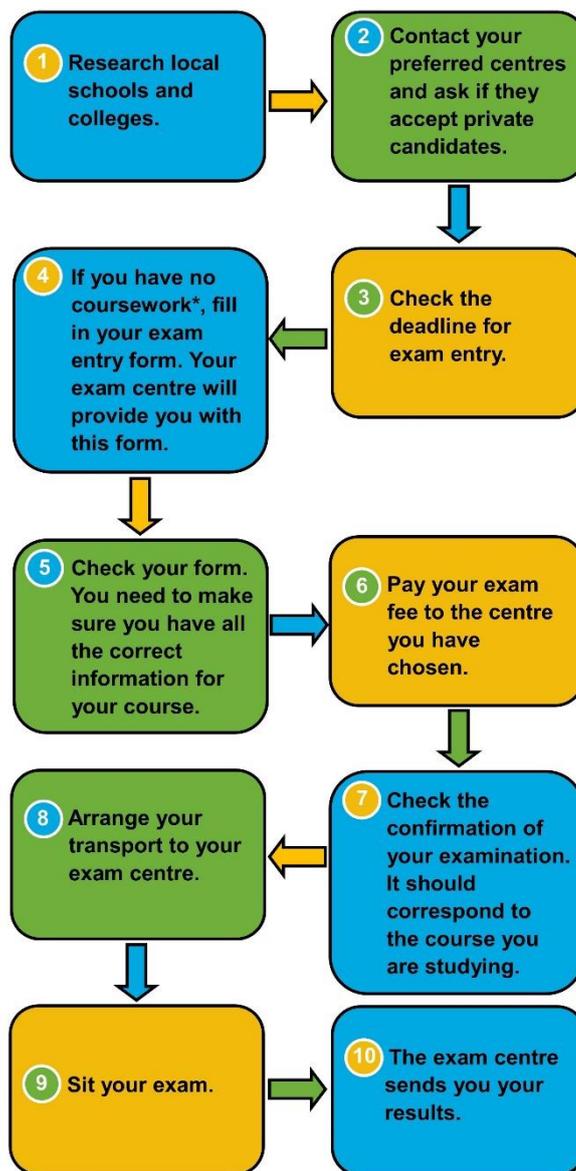
You are not automatically entered for exams when you enrol on a course with NEC. To enter for your exam at one of our partnership exam centres, you **must complete an exam application form**.

Taking your exams: your choices

Book a guaranteed exam place at one of NEC's partnership exam centres:



Alternatively, you can find your own exam centre:



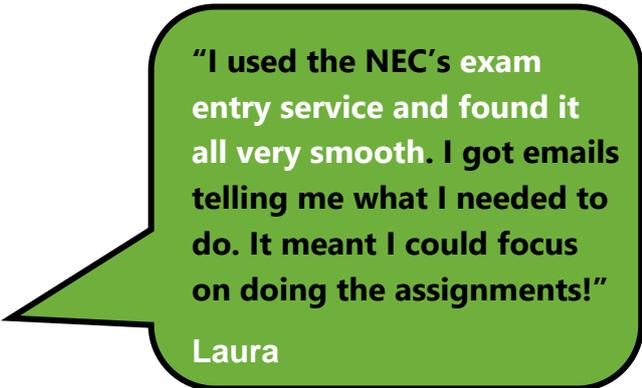
* Where an endorsement or oral exam is attached to the A level or GCSE, exam centres can only accept your entry if they are an approved centre and willing to provide you with the opportunity to complete the endorsement/oral. Due to this you may find that centres willing to accept you are harder to find.

NEC's unique examination entry service

If you are doing a GCSE, A level or other distance learning course that leads to a qualification from an awarding organisation, you will need to sit at least one exam. Exams are strictly controlled and can only be taken at registered exam centres on specified dates.

For distance learners this can be difficult – locating an exam centre and ensuring that you are entered correctly can be stressful for students. Most distance learning providers are only able to offer guidance on how to do this.

NEC is in the unique position of being able to offer a guaranteed exam place for all of our students at one of our partnership exam centres across the UK.



"I used the NEC's exam entry service and found it all very smooth. I got emails telling me what I needed to do. It meant I could focus on doing the assignments!"

Laura

By choosing one of our partnership exam centres you can be confident that your application process will be seamless.

Exam fees

The cost of sitting your exams is not included in your course fee. The cost will vary depending on your choice of exam centre and whether your subject involves oral exams, coursework, spoken language endorsements, or practical science endorsements. You should also bear in mind that you will need to make your own travel arrangements to attend your exam.

Your exam fee includes:

- the awarding organisation fee, to enter you for the exam
- an administration fee to cover the expense incurred in providing you with NEC's exam entry service, including sitting your exam at one of our partnership exam centres.

If you are already an NEC student and currently enrolled on one of our courses, you can access a full list of exam fees on **learn@nec**.

If you are booking your own exam centre, bear in mind there may be additional costs (see page 25).



Once you have entered for your exam, the awarding organisation does not offer any refund of your exam fee, even if you change your mind.

“We advise all our learners to use one of our partnership exam centres. It is the easiest option for you and guarantees you are entered for the right exam on the right day. All you need to do is complete the application form and we do the rest!”

Joanne, Senior Administrator Exams and Assessment

Entry deadlines

As a guideline, summer exams usually have a deadline in January. If you have special access arrangements the deadline will be earlier. Once you are enrolled on a course with NEC, entry deadlines will be available to you through our online learning platform **learn@nec**.

Late entries incur an additional cost, set by the awarding organisation. In addition to this, all exam centres have a date after which they do not accept any entries.



If you are studying a science and planning on taking the practical endorsement, the entry deadline will be earlier. You may also have an earlier deadline if your course has non-examination assessment (NEA).

Access arrangements

If you are using one of our exam partnership centres and have special access requirements, such as extra time or use of a laptop, we'll work with you and the exam centre to see what is possible. You'll need documents that support evidence of need. These documents must be in the form of a full assessment report and written evidence from an educational establishment, listing the special access arrangements required and your normal way of working. In some cases, medical evidence may also be required.

Make sure you tell us about your special access arrangements as soon as possible (preferably when you enrol and at latest when you complete your exam application form), as your exam entry deadline will be early. In most cases, additional fees may be incurred.

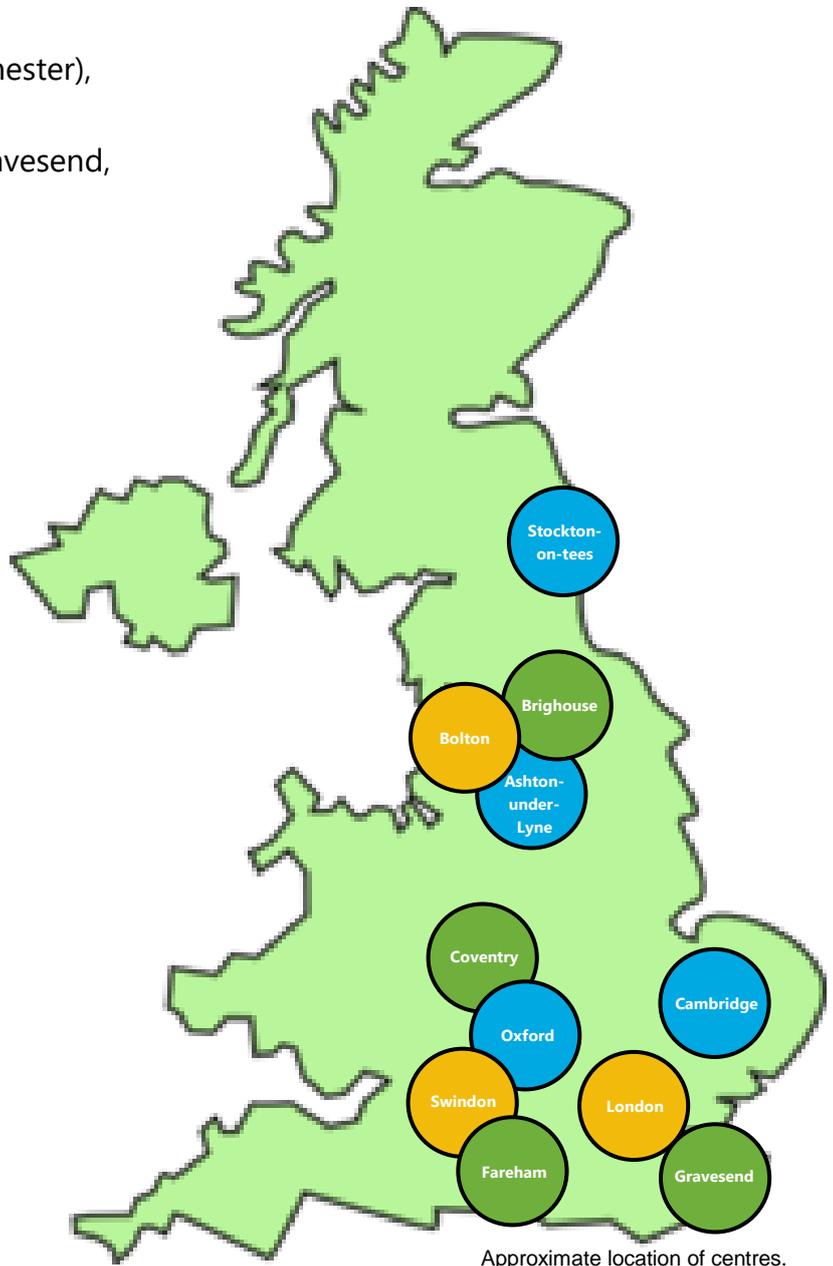
If you want to sit an exam at the end of your course you will need to make arrangements to sit your exam at least six months before the exam date.

NEC partnership exam centres

We currently have exam centres in Ashton-under-Lyne (Greater Manchester), Bolton, Brighouse (West Yorkshire), Cambridge, Coventry, Fareham, Gravesend, London, Oxford, Stockton-on-Tees, and Swindon.

"We've spent years building up strong relationships with our partnership exam centres which means we can react quickly if any problems arise, and we know that you'll receive a professional service from them on exam day. You've got enough to think about, so we'll worry about that part for you!"

Louise, Assessment Manager



If you are an NEC student and wish to sit an exam at one of our partnership exam centres we can arrange this for you.

What our students say about taking their exams through NEC's partnership exam centres

Quotes about exam centres by NEC students who sat their exams in summer 2017.



Non-examination assessments (NEAs)

For some subjects there will be an element of non-examination assessments.

Candidates studying subjects such as an A level in English Literature, English Language or History are required to complete a non-examined assessment (coursework) as well as the written papers to achieve the qualification.*

To do both the written examinations and NEA for these subjects, you will be required to enter for your exam with NEC. We will be responsible for all aspects of the NEA, which includes supervision, authentication, marking and following all administration requirements specified by the awarding organisations.

By enrolling with NEC, you are safe in the knowledge that as an approved centre we can offer a complete service to students. We are able to deal with all aspects of NEA subjects from supervision and authentication through to examination. We will guide you through the NEA process as well as the process for written exams.

** Please note that A level French and A level Spanish also have an NEA-type requirement.*

"I have just got an A in my History and want to thank you all at NEC for making the NEA bit so easy. No other distance learning provider was able to provide me with the 'one stop shop' service that you gave to me. Thanks – I would not have got the A grade had I been struggling to sort out the admin bits of the qualification."

Ben

NEC is an approved centre for NEA. If you enrol on a course with NEC that has NEA elements you will have access to assessment for the NEA part of the course.

Oral exams (modern foreign languages)

For subjects that include an oral examination as part of the assessment we can guarantee you a place at a number of our partnership exam centres.

If you are organising your exams yourself (see page 24), remember to check that they can deal with all aspects of the assessment, including orals, as the entry can't be split across two centres.

Spoken language endorsement

The GCSE English Language course includes a spoken language endorsement. This assessment is separately endorsed, and you will receive a separate grade which does not contribute to your GCSE result. You can choose not to complete the spoken language endorsement, however NEC recommends that you take it as failing to pass the endorsement could affect future educational applications.

As an approved centre for non-examination assessment (NEA), you will have access to assessment through NEC if you are taking your exam at one of our partnership exam centres.



If you choose to sit your exams at one of our partnership exam centres, but do not wish to complete the spoken language endorsement, we will need you to sign a declaration to say that you have decided not to take the opportunity to complete the spoken language endorsement.



You have to sit the spoken language endorsement at the same sitting as the written exam, but if you resit the written examination the spoken language endorsement can be carried over.

If your course has NEA elements you can [download our free guides](#) to NEA, practical or language endorsements.

Science practical endorsements

What is the practical endorsement?

Science is a practical subject – so you can also gain an endorsement to confirm your practical skills. This supplement to the qualification may be taken alongside a science A level. It is assessed in laboratories while you are doing experiments (i.e. separately from the written exam) and your A level grade is not affected by whether you take the practical endorsement or not.

However, NEC recommends that you take this practical endorsement. Some universities may specify the practical endorsement as an entry requirement for certain courses*. It will enhance your understanding of practical science, which is assessed in the written exam; and it will make you a better scientist.

The practical endorsement is graded as either passed or not certified. To pass the practical endorsement students must provide evidence of having completed a series of experiments during which they demonstrate some core practical skills.

** You should check the entry requirements of any university you are considering applying to in good time.*

“Science is a practical subject and you need to demonstrate both your scientific understanding and practical skills. Your understanding of practical science will be tested by questions in the exam. Fifteen percent of the available marks are allocated for this. That is sufficient to affect the final grade achieved. Your practical skills will be assessed through the practical endorsement.”

**Donal, Practical Endorsement Lead Tutor,
Biology**

NEC recommends that you
take this practical endorsement.

The NEC programme for the practical endorsement

The practical endorsement is designed to be assessed by teachers during practical classes within schools. As this is not possible for distance learning students, NEC has developed a practical endorsement programme specifically for distance learners.

We have worked with Edexcel and selected partnership exam centres to help our students achieve the practical endorsement, and can offer two routes for the assessment:

- **NEC centre assessment**

A level science students complete all core practical experiments under laboratory conditions in one of four exam centres. Currently our exam centres in Brighouse (West Yorkshire), Coventry, London and Oxford accept entries for all three science A levels. Written exams can be taken at any of our partnership exam centres.

- **Combined assessment – Exclusive to NEC students**

A level science students complete some core practicals at home and submit evidence to their tutor. Remaining core practical experiments are completed under laboratory conditions at our partnership exam centres in Coventry or London. Written exams must be taken at the same centre as the practical endorsement.

How to enter for the practical endorsement

All you need to do is fill out the exam application form and we'll do the rest, making sure you are entered for the correct exams and endorsements and ensuring that we are then able to support you fully.

If you choose the *NEC centre assessment* you can sit the written exams at the same centre, or another NEC partnership exam centre that may be closer to home. However, you should be aware that it is cheaper for you to complete everything at the same centre.



If you choose to sit your exams at one of our partnership exam centres, but do not wish to complete the practical endorsement, we will need you to sign a declaration to say that you have decided not to take the opportunity to complete the practical endorsement.



You have to sit the practical endorsement at the same sitting as the written exam, but if you resit the written examination the practical endorsement can be carried over.

Your Guide to Exams

For students entering for GCSE, IGCSE or A level exams as a private candidate in 2019.

If you are organising your exams yourself (see page 24), you must make sure the exam centre is able to offer you the chance to take the practical endorsement, whether you decide to complete it or not. If they don't, they are not approved by the awarding organisation to offer the exam. Be sure to ask them to confirm that your fees include the practical endorsement.

Whatever decision you make about the practical endorsement, entering for your exams through NEC with one of our partnership exam centres ensures a seamless and stress-free service for you.

Lab experience days

Our centres in Coventry and London can also offer lab experience days. These sessions have been invaluable for many and give students a good head start for the official endorsement sessions. The emphasis will be on safety, equipment, mocks and expectations. The tutors will be able to advise on the best approach to collecting, analysing and presenting the data. This provides a fantastic opportunity for those that have little or no prior lab experience. You can apply for these days when completing your NEC exam application form.

Overseas students

Because our courses are delivered by distance learning you can study with us no matter where you are in the world. You receive your course materials and communicate with your tutor and the student support team in exactly the same way that a UK-based student would.

However, before you enrol with us you need to be aware that not all of the UK awarding organisations hold exams overseas; AQA exams are not available for private candidates to sit outside the UK at all.



If you wish to sit an exam at the end of your course, it's essential you get in touch with the relevant awarding organisation before you enrol to find out where you can sit the exam and how much it will cost. You can find contact details for the awarding organisations we work with on the [Partners and associates](#) page on our website.

You can also visit the [British Council website](#) to find out about taking UK exams if you live overseas.

If you live overseas and have any questions about studying with NEC, please get in touch. You can call us on **(+44) (0)1223 400200** or send us an email to **info@nec.ac.uk**.

Our course materials include activities and assignments to prepare you for formal assessment. They assume that English is your first language. If it is not, we recommend that you download a **free course sample** of the course(s) you plan to study from our [website](#), to check that your English is sufficient to enable you to complete the course.

All our course materials are written in English, so you will need a good standard of written English and English comprehension.

Preparing for your exams

How NEC can help you prepare you for your exams

We believe that the NEC model of carefully designed learning materials, one-to-one tutor support and exam services provides our students with the best chance of success. We are proud of what we do and build on over 50 years' experience of supporting students at a distance.

Our course materials are specifically written and structured for independent study, enabling you to build your knowledge and skills and guide you through assessment and exam requirements. Each course offers guidance on answering exam questions.

You can download past papers from the awarding organisation's website and can have them marked as an additional service (there may be a fee for this).

Our tutors

Our tutors are all subject specialists, and their carefully structured feedback will guide you towards improving your work with each assignment. Many of our tutors are also examiners and so have detailed knowledge of the requirements of awarding organisations. They are familiar with examiners reports and will share the 'top tips' with you.

Additional tutorials are also available on request.

Once you have enrolled you will have access to our many services, our forums and student support site – all guiding you towards examination success!

What you can do yourself to prepare for your exam

Make sure that you are ready for your exam. In addition to your revision, the day before the exam check that you know:

- where the exam is taking place; how to get there and how long it will take you to get there
- the start time
- your candidate number / centre number
- what you are allowed to bring to your exam.

Plan the details of your journey, allowing plenty of time to get to the exam centre to make sure that you arrive at the examination room early – most exam centres specify at least 30 minutes before the start of the exam – so you are not panicking about being late.

Get ready your proof of identity or photo ID, anything you need to take such as pens, pencils, a calculator if you are allowed one, any maths equipment you are permitted to take into the examination room, and a bottle of water to keep you hydrated.



If you haven't received your exam timetable (usually sent out at the beginning of April) contact your exam centre – or NEC if you have used our exam service – as soon as possible.

You can find lots more help with preparing for your exam on our blog www.nec.ac.uk/blog.

Things to bear in mind for exam day

Build in contingency time, in case the exam is running late

The invigilator will tell you when to start the exam. Sometimes the exam may start a little later than planned. If you have transport booked, children to collect from school, caring responsibilities, or other plans for after the exam, make sure you have allowed extra time in case your exam is running late. You don't want to have to leave before the end.

Be prepared for minimal noise

Whilst your exam centre will endeavour to make sure that the examination room is as quiet as possible, there may be some minimal noise. Invigilators may need to have a short, quiet conversation; other students may need to leave the room for short periods; and there may be external noise that is beyond the control of the centre. Don't expect complete silence.

Leave your mobile devices at home

If a mobile phone, smartwatch or other electronic device such as an iPod or MP3/4 player, even turned off, is found on you during your exam you are likely to receive a penalty and may even be disqualified from the exam and overall qualification. So, make sure that you leave your devices outside the examination room, or even at home.

You must also

- make sure you have read any notices displayed outside the examination room before you enter
- follow the instructions of the invigilator
- not talk to or attempt to talk to or distract in any way, other candidates once you enter the examination room.

Exam pass guarantee

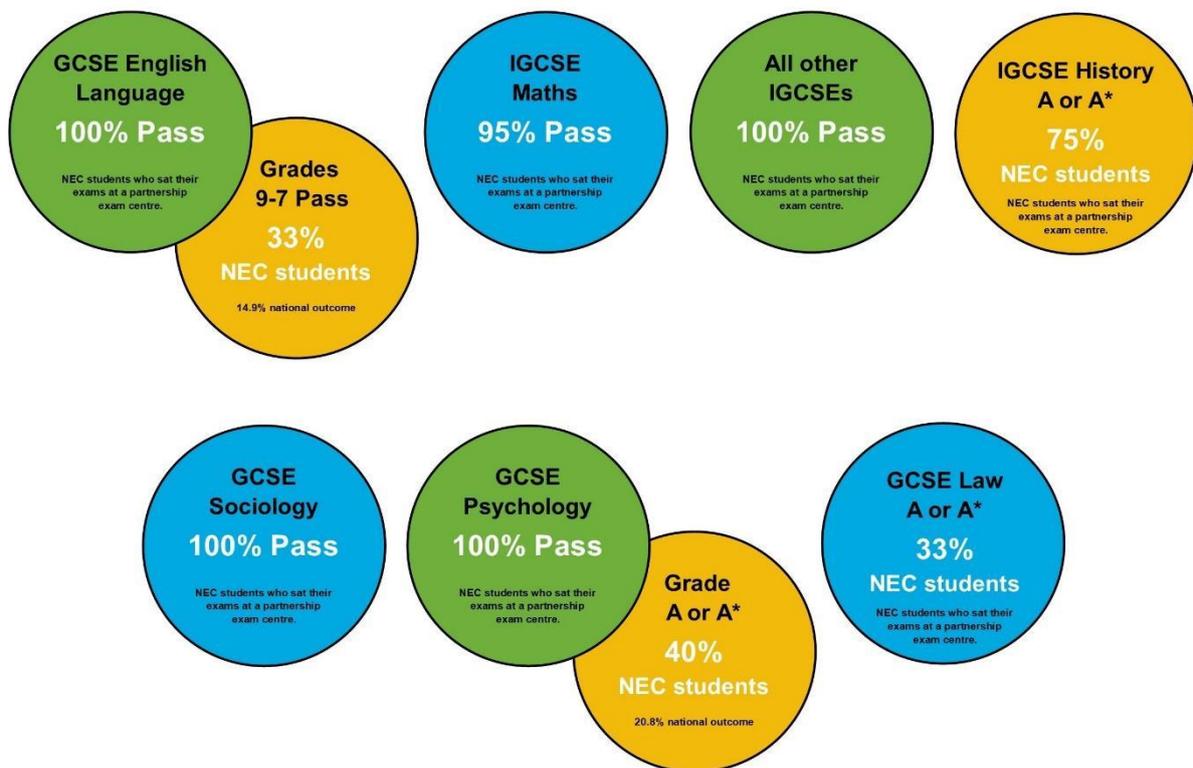
We are confident that if you complete all your assignments and follow our advice on working through the course, you will pass your exams. If you don't, get in touch and we'll arrange support for you to try again at the next exam session. You should be aware that we are only able to do this if you have completed all your assignments and the specification for your course is still being examined.

NEC exam results in 2017

At NEC we are proud of our exceptional students.

Everyone in education acknowledges 2017 was a particularly challenging year for GCSE and A level students, with some of them having to rush to take the last exams in legacy subjects and others taking the new reformed specifications for the first time.

GCSE and IGCSE results



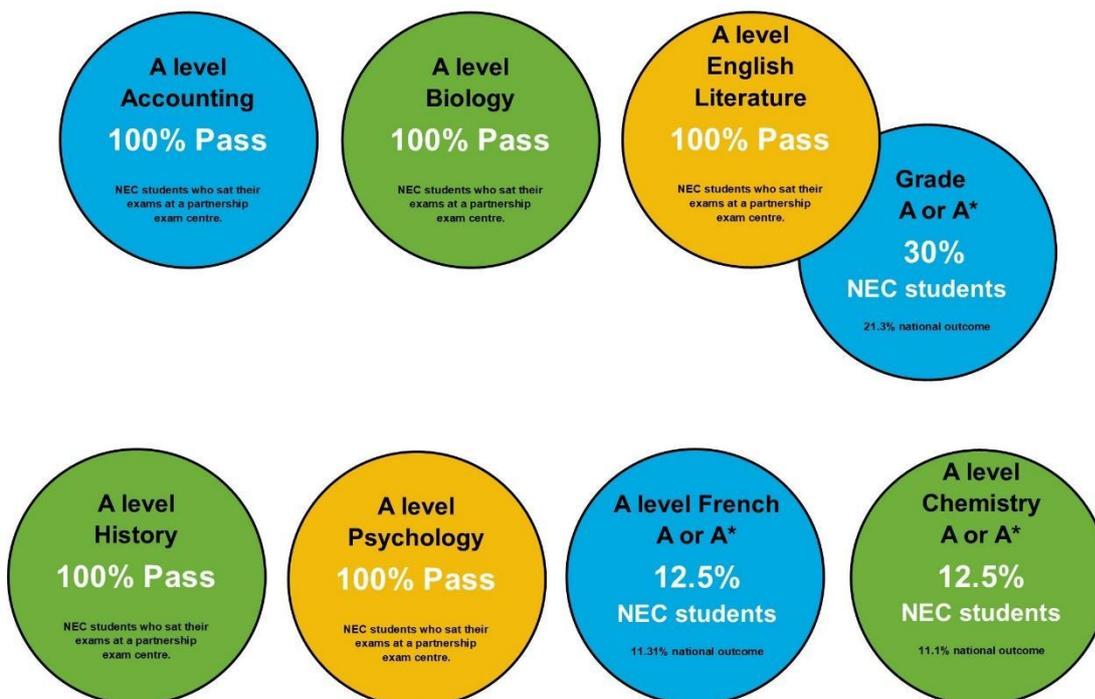
We are particularly proud of the results for the new 9-1 GCSE English Language.

A level results

New specifications



Legacy A levels



NEC students consistently perform as well as or better than national outcomes.

A message for the tutor and NEC team

“Just wanted to let you know that I got 84%, which is an A grade! This is totally unexpected and beyond my wildest dreams. I put my success firmly with you and your relentless, patience and very prompt responses throughout the six months. The result will change my life and has made my confidence soar! I am well on my way to becoming a primary school teacher and only hope I can be half as good a mentor and teacher as you. Thank you, thank you so much and all the very best to you.”

Stella

If you are an NEC student taking your exams through one of our partnership exam centres or at a centre you have booked yourself we'd love to hear how you get on.

Life-long learning is a passion for many and NEC learner Catherine is an inspirational example

Catherine has what she describes as a 'haphazard routine', with her hours of work constantly changing. She did well at school but was frustrated that there were some subjects she had to drop. Now in her forties she's catching up with the subjects she left behind and received her results for IGCSE French. We are proud to say that she achieved an A*. Distance learning worked for Catherine because she is very self-motivated and knows exactly how much self-discipline you need to succeed.

Organising your own exams

You may decide to organise your own exams and choose your own exam centre.

If you decide not to use NEC's unique exam entry service, you can enter privately with a centre which accepts private candidates.

There are a number of exam centres across the UK that accept private candidates, but you will need to be resourceful to find your own exam centre. Most people approach their old school or a school or FE college where you may know people or have previously studied. Some awarding organisations publish a list of centres that may accept private candidates on their website. We can also provide a list of centres where our students have previously been accepted as private candidates.



If you decide to organise your own exams, you must take full responsibility for ensuring you are entered for the correct examinations and understand that NEC will only be able to offer limited support if any issues arise.

What you will need to do if you decide to organise your own exams

Before you start the process of finding your own exam centre, you must ensure you are very clear about the full title of the course you are studying, the name of the awarding organisation and the specification number. If you are enrolled on a course with NEC, you will find these on our online learning platform **learn@nec**. If in any doubt, please email **student.support@nec.ac.uk**.

You should also check the date that the exam is scheduled to take place on the awarding organisation's website.

If you choose to find your own exam centre you will need to register as an external or private candidate.

Booking your exams if you are organising them yourself

We recommend that you book your exams at least six months before the exam session starts. Private exam centres will have their own exam entry deadlines that are likely to be earlier than those listed by the awarding organisations. Please note late entries incur additional charges and centres are not obliged to take late entries.

If you are booking your own exam centre bear in mind there may be additional costs if you are:

- the only candidate taking a particular exam and the invigilation costs cannot be offset against the centre's own candidates
- taking an exam that uses special equipment or materials that have to be provided
- using special access requirements that have to be paid for.

"Last time I studied with NEC there weren't as many exam centres, so I went back to my old school to do my GCSE English.

It was fine, but quite stressful as I entered myself for the wrong exam.

I sorted it out in the end, but I wasn't going to make that mistake again."

Tracey

NEC as a campaigner

Our experience shows that individual learners have a difficult task when trying to book their own exams. By using our unique exam entry service, you will avoid many of the problems encountered – we always do everything in our power to make it easy for our students.

We are also known for our campaigning and are always working hard to make access easier for *all* distance learning students.

Visit www.nec.ac.uk find out more about the work we do.

Further sources of information

We have worked closely with UCAS to prepare a series of **free study skills guides**, which provide further information and guidance – including one on *Understanding and answering exam questions*. You can [download them from the UCAS website](#).

You can also find out more about exams from the awarding organisations. You can find contact details for the awarding organisations we work with on the [Partners and associates](#) page on our website.

A public exam system that works for everyone

Read about our [campaign for a public exam system that works for everyone](#).



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National Extension College

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