For students entering for GCSE, IGCSE or A level exams as a private candidate in 2020.
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 non-exam assessments (NEA), for example assessed coursework; or for students who have special needs, for example need a computer for the exam.

The National Extension College (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.

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 10

Appropriate evidence for access arrangement applications 11

NEC partnership exam centres 12

What our students say about taking their exams through NEC’s partnership exam centres 13

Non-exam assessments (NEAs) 14

Oral exams (modern foreign languages) 15

Spoken language endorsement (GCSE English Language) 15

Science practical endorsements 16

What is the practical endorsement? 16

The NEC programme for the practical endorsement 17

How to enter for the practical endorsement? 17

Overseas students 19

Preparing for your exams 20

How NEC can help you prepare for your exams 20

What you can do yourself to prepare for your exam 21
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.

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

A pioneer of distance learning, the National Extension College (NEC) transforms lives through education. Founded in 1963 by Michael Young and Brian Jackson as a forerunner for the Open University, NEC is a long-standing independent educational charity and part of the Open School Trust. Today, we remain committed to our founder’s vision to create: “education without institution, learning while earning, courses which people of all ages can take in their own time, at their own pace.”

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 2020. 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 exams 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-exam assessments, plus practical endorsements and spoken language endorsements. We also offer an exam pass guarantee to our students (terms and conditions apply, see page 22), and NEC students consistently perform as well as or better in exams than national outcomes.

Once you have read through this handbook, if you have any questions or want to find out more about booking exams or non-exam assessments (NEA) with NEC, contact our exams team who will be happy to help you make the right choices. Call us on 0800 389 2839 or email exams@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:

1. Complete an application form for NEC’s unique examination entry service and return it with your photo ID.

2. NEC’s exams team will contact you for exam fee payment. Once you have paid we will make your exam entry. You are then entered.

3. You will need to check your Statement of Entry/timetable to make sure your personal details are correct.

4. NEC’s exams team will send updates and provide support.

5. You will need to arrange your own transport to get to your exam centre. You may need to book accommodation too.

6. You sit your exams.

7. NEC or our partnership exam centre sends you your results.

Alternatively, you can find your own exam centre:

1. Research local schools and colleges.

2. Contact your preferred centres and ask if they accept private candidates.

3. Check the deadline for exam entry.

4. If you have no coursework*, fill in your exam entry form. Your exam centre will provide you with this form.

5. Check your form. You need to make sure you have all the correct information for your course.

6. Pay your exam fee to the centre you have chosen.

7. Check the confirmation of your examination. It should correspond to the course you are studying.

8. Arrange your transport to your exam centre.

9. Sit your exam.

10. The exam centre sends you your results.

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* 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. If your course has NEA coursework you have to be entered for your exams by NEC.
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.

Indicative fees
If you would like an idea of what the exam fees for your course may be, our team can give you a guide, but this will be an indicative amount and the actual fee for your exam may be different because exam centres set their own fees.

These are a guide only, your actual exam fees may be different.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A levels</th>
<th>A level sciences including the practical endorsement</th>
<th>GCSEs / IGCSEs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>£500</td>
<td>£1,500</td>
<td>£250</td>
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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 the Exams and Assessment page of learn@nec.

If you are booking your own exam centre, bear in mind there may be additional costs (see page 27).

Once you have entered for your exam, NEC cannot offer any refund of your exam fee, even if you change your mind.
Practical endorsement fees

These fees may seem high. This is because as well as the fee for the practical element, they cover the cost of your access to a laboratory to complete the practical, any equipment you need, and your insurance and health and safety costs as a private candidate.

If you are organising your exams yourself, you should check with your exam centre to see if the fee for the written exams is included with the practical endorsement fee or if you will need to pay for these separately.

“We advise all our students 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 an entry deadline set by the awarding bodies in February, but if you are entering for your exams using our exam entry service our deadline is in January. If you have special access arrangements (see page 10), your exam entry deadlines will be earlier. Once you are enrolled on a course with NEC, entry deadlines will be available to you on the Exams and Assessment page of learn@nec.

Private centres will have their own deadlines so if you are organising your own exams (see pages 27 & 28) make sure you check what the centre’s deadline for entry is.

Late entries have 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 a non-exam assessment (NEA) element.
Access arrangements
Access arrangements aim to meet the needs of students with special educational needs (SEND), a disability or temporary injury, without changing the demands of the examination or assessment. They must be approved before the exam or assessment takes place.

If you are using one of our partnership exam centres and need special access arrangements, we’ll work with you and the exam centre to see what is possible. Our partnership exam centres will do their best to accommodate this where the appropriate evidence (see next page) has been accepted. In all cases, additional fees will be incurred.

Make sure you tell us about your special access arrangement needs 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. You will need to complete an Access Arrangement Questionnaire and forward this and your evidence to us with your exam application form. Special access arrangements may include:

- supervised rest breaks
- use of a laptop
- smaller venue
- reader/scribe/prompt
- modified question papers
- extra time.

You can find more information about access arrangements, including the use of Assistive Technology on the Joint Council for Qualifications (JCQ) website.

Make sure you tell us about your special access arrangements as soon as possible as your exam entry deadline will be early.
Appropriate evidence for access arrangement applications

If you need special access arrangements, you’ll need documents that support your evidence of need. The evidence required depends on the type of access arrangement requested and the reasons it is required. You can find out more about the evidence you may need to provide on the JCQ website.

The sort of evidence you may be asked for if you are requesting access arrangements include:

- The original signed copy of any previous Form 8 Assessment from your school or college, including assessment scores from a specialist assessor, and a copy of the assessor’s qualification.
- Reports containing reference to the need of support within learning or tests. These can be from a school, college or private tutor.
- An Individual Education Plan (IEP) or equivalent stating the need and use of support during learning.
- An Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) relating to a learning disability or issue.
- A letter showing evidence of a disability or other issue that will affect you during an examination. This letter could be from a SENCo, educational psychologist, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), local authority, occupational health and specialised therapist. A letter from your GP is not acceptable.
- Mock exam papers.

If you are requesting extra time for learning difficulties, you will need to provide core evidence. This could be a current statement of SEN relating to secondary education or an EHCP confirming your disability; an assessment by an assessor confirming a learning difficulty relating to secondary or further education, or a Form 8 Assessment.

For information about SEND (special education needs and disabilities) see your local council’s website or visit www.gov.uk.

You may also need to provide other supporting evidence that shows your normal way of working requires extra time.

 NEC is not able to guarantee your request for special access arrangements will be approved. The awarding organisation is responsible for approving access arrangement requests and your application may not be approved if they feel your evidence does not show need.
NEC partnership exam centres

We currently have partnership 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, Examinations and 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 partnership exam centres by NEC students.

“Very pleased with the exam centre, better than I expected.”
Mo

“All went very smoothly, no problems, communication was great, thanks for making a stressful thing less stressful!”
Sabine

“The examination officer and invigilator were very efficient, organised and courteous. They created a very calming atmosphere, which is very important.”
Robert

“Thank you for making the exam process as stress free as possible. Having info from them, including a text reminder, made me confident about their abilities to provide for my needs.”
Omar
Non-exam assessments (NEAs)

For some subjects there will be an element of non-exam assessment.

Students studying subjects such as an A level in English literature, English language or history need to complete a non-exam 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. We can then transfer you to a centre of your choice for the written exams.

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.

“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.”

Ian
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 27), remember to check that the exam centre can deal with all aspects of the assessment, including orals.

Students studying A level French or A level Spanish also have to produce an individual research project (IRP) which has to be authenticated by their tutor.

Spoken language endorsement (GCSE English Language)

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-exam 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 from our website www.nec.ac.uk.
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 in 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 take the practical endorsement, and can offer two routes for the assessment:

- **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 Birmingham or London. Written exams must be taken at the same centre as the practical endorsement.

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

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.
If you are organising your exams yourself (see page 27), 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 familiarisation days

Partnership exam centres in Birmingham and London also include lab familiarisation 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.
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 personal tutor and Student Support 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 our website www.nec.ac.uk.

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, support from a personal tutor 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.

If you are applying to university and you need predicted grades, your NEC personal tutor can provide these for you as long as you have completed at least four assignments on your course. You need to have completed four assignments or more as your tutor needs to get a measure of your work in order to provide you with predicted grades.

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 website [www.nec.ac.uk](http://www.nec.ac.uk).

University beckons for Ben

Ben needed at least an A grade in order to go to Cardiff University to study psychology. “I’m feeling relieved”, he says after getting an A* for A level Psychology. “Overall my experience with NEC was very positive and suited me very well … the exam days all went smoothly, no problems at all. Thanks for providing such a good service! I’ll be sure to recommend NEC to anyone looking to do an online course.”
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 do their best 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 exam 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.

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**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.
Why NEC? They arranged all of my exams for me

“GCSEs are like a passport for any profession”, says Najma, who enrolled on NEC’s maths and English language courses in order to access a place on a PGCE course. An Open University graduate with a maths degree, Najma was familiar with distance learning and knew what she was looking for from her course. After reviewing several distance learning providers, she decided that NEC was the best choice. “NEC arranged the exams with one of their exam centres, whereas with other colleges you had to arrange your exams yourself. I was unsure about organising my own exams, with NEC, they were all nicely organised for me.”

Success in distance learning is all about flexibility and organisation. As a mum of two, Najma needed to fit her studying in around childcare, “The flexibility of the course was a definite highlight,” she says. With a maths degree already – but with a specialism in material and applied mathematics – Najma needed to pick out other parts of the maths course that hadn’t been covered by her degree. This was made easy, she says, because the courses were so logically structured, “Being a distance learning course, it had to be in a logical order so that students can follow it.”

Najma particularly valued the support she got from her personal tutor on the English language course. “In Pakistan, English is a second language and taught accordingly,” she says. “The coursework level of analysis was totally different. I called my tutor when I didn’t understand something, and he always helped me. I felt I had the whole package in studying the English GCSE with NEC!”

“In fact, from day one with NEC, I was guided step-by-step and talked through the whole process.” This included sorting out financial arrangements, “NEC helped me with a plan that worked for me,” says Najma.

For prospective students her advice, says Najma is simple, “Make a rigid schedule and stick to it. Allocate a certain amount of time for your study and follow this schedule.”
NEC exam results

At NEC we are proud of our exceptional students.

NEC is in a unique position amongst distance learning providers because, as an approved exam centre, we have access to the exam results of most of our students.

Exam results in 2018 were complicated: GCSE exams because they included the new 9 to 1 GCSE grading, but for some subjects the A to E grading continued; A level exams because they included both legacy and reformed specifications in some subjects like maths.

Some examples of the pass rates by NEC students who took exams in 2018 are below.

GCSE and IGCSE results

The overall pass rate of NEC students taking GCSEs and IGCSEs in summer 2018 was 95.91%.
A level results

The overall pass rate of NEC students taking A level exams in summer 2018 was 85.4%.

Science IGCSEs leave Elizabeth over the moon

Elizabeth studied IGCSEs in biology, chemistry and physics with NEC gaining an A and two A* grades. “To say I am pleased with my results would be an understatement,” she says, “I am over the moon. It has been a very exciting year, learning new topics, writing assignments, revising. I enjoyed every minute, even when I thought I am never going to finish, the challenge of it kept me going. My experience of NEC has been extremely positive, I have only good things to say about the student support, the course, the tutors, everything really ... even if I decided to do no more studying it is a worthwhile experience as you gain so much.”
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 student 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.

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 your online learning platform learn@nec. If in any doubt, please email exams@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 a 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 do not have 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 the 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 arrangements 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

An eye on further study follows exam success
After getting a B in her A level Classical Civilisation exams, 47-year-old working mum of two Catherine has her eye on further study. “I got 94/100 for the Art and Architecture module, which is the icing on the cake for me - I utterly adored the module and it has really inspired me over the past few months,” she says. “I’ve really enjoyed the last two years of studying, thanks to NEC. The materials are excellent and the assessments really useful in terms of preparing for the exams.

I feel quite disappointed that it’s all over but perhaps I’ll return ... I have my eye on the Latin course!”
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 find out more about taking exams as a private candidate on the awarding organisation’s websites:

- AQA
- CAIE
- OCR
- Pearson Edexcel

A public exam system that works for everyone

Visit our website www.nec.ac.uk to read about our campaign for a public exam system that works for everyone.
Your Guide to Exams
For students entering for GCSE, IGCSE or A level exams as a private candidate in 2020.

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