

My daughter decided at the age of 12 that she wanted to try Catherine Mooney's English course and, as it leads to the Edexcel IGCSE, we decided that we'd start exploring options for exam entry. When we were about halfway through the course we contacted the LA for a list of local exam centres. This was provided but when we contacted a couple of relevant schools we found that they didn't provide IGCSE access, since it was limited to specific exam boards and types of paper.

We then contacted Edexcel and picked the nearest exam centre from their list which was in a school. The exams officer at the school was absolutely brilliant (sadly, she leaves next year and we will have to see whether there is continuity in this respect). She ensured we were up to date with procedures and systems and kept us informed throughout. Catherine Mooney also gave great guidance on exam technique.

I think we were very lucky in our initial experience. It was good to have the reassurance of knowing exactly what we needed to do to enrol for the exam and what we needed to bring along for ID purposes. The fact that the systems in the exam centre are so robust was really helpful. It meant that a group of us were able to easily organize an ICT practical paper which might have been difficult elsewhere.

My daughter has taken 3 exams so far and will take another 4 or 5 over the next 2 years. For the exams we have taken so far, it has been straightforward to find an exam centre, but for Music, which is one of my daughter's strongest subjects, it has proved a near impossibility and the only options available are far too expensive and would involve a huge amount of travelling.

The exam fee was £40 per qualification paid to the exam board. We also paid for the English course and for the ICT, we shared the cost of the practical and an on-site mock exam.

We know that there are ways around having no paper qualifications for post-16 education, however, for the subjects in which my daughter is most interested it's easier by far to have the standard 5 GCSE level grades A*-C. My daughter will probably sit A level Music and has already had confirmation from a couple of 6th form colleges/centres that they will be happy to take her on the basis of her ABRSM graded exams.