A level and IGCSE students speak out about exam cancellations

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SECONDARY and higher learning institutions in Malaysia offering A Level and IGCSE have yet to come to a decision on the action to be taken following the cancellation of the May and June examinations due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Level is offered in two sessions annually; in May and June, and October and November. The exam is split into two components, known as the Advanced Subsidiary (AS) Level and A2 Level.

Schools and students were waiting for the international qualifications provider, Cambridge Assessment International Education (CAIE), to set up the latest assessment guidelines.

Sunway College Kuala Lumpur (SCKL) student Kloe Xavier, 19, said she felt discouraged as she was supposed to sit her A Level in May before entering university in September.

"Students and teachers have put a lot of effort into preparing for this exam. My parents are not happy because they believe that students do much better in the real exams. With the cancellations, students may not be able to show their true capabilities," she said.

Having applied to University of Bristol and University of Loughborough in the United Kingdom, she was unsure if her university admission would be affected.

"I believe my lecturers have predicted my grades and each university has given me a conditional offer based on the grades." SCKL student Adam Ramzi, 18, had received offers from Durham University, University of Edinburgh, University of St Andrews and University of Kent for the September intake. He was supposed to sit his A Level this May.

"I feel at a loss and am worried. I'm not sure how CAIE can grade me fairly. My mother expressed her concern about the exam cancellation as well. I hope that universities will take into account the extenuating circumstances that students were put in to ensure that the process is fair."

Each student progressed differently and one might improve after the mock exams, he added. Ong Hao Zhe, 19, also from SCKL, was supposed to sit AS Level in the May and June series and A2 Level in October and November.

"An alternative grade assessment based on overall class performance, past assessments and future college-based exams are disadvantageous to some students, perhaps all of us. College-based exams or mocks as the sole determinants, or one of the factors, would render the assessment unjust as the difficulty levels vary across institutions."

Some students had not maintained a consistent performance throughout their studies, he added. Ong said he was prepared for any outcome, including postponement.

"We don't mind extending our programme if the entire world is doing so as well. Furthermore, most universities are still available in August and September 2021."

Brickfields Asia College A Level student Aadithya Naidu Mohanakrishnan, 17, who was also supposed to sit AS and A Levels this year, was upset upon hearing the news.

"We don't know how we're going to be assessed now. My parents have been supportive and assured me that I would not be at a disadvantage because universities will evaluate the circumstances," he said.

Aiming for the top law schools in the UK, such as University of Cambridge and University of Bristol, Aadithya said many Malaysian students have not sit mock exams due to the Movement Control Order (MCO).

"I also don't think the mock exam is a proper reflection of a student's abilities. A lot of us are unsure if we still need to study for exams."

"I think CAIE should've held the announcement until they have a solid plan to avoid panic and confusion." Sri Kuala Lumpur School student Lim Jun Kit, 17, had spent about 15 hours a week studying for IGCSE. "I am concerned about my grades, especially for my Chinese and Malay papers scheduled in May and June, but I understand that it is inevitable. My parents said I should be positive and aim for the best," he said.

"I have yet to receive a notice from my school about the new assessments. I know my teachers will give a fair grading and with enough practice I will do well."

IGCSE student Zamira Batrisyia Shahrol Anwar, 16, who studies at an international school in Selangor, felt discouraged.

"There is more anxiety now among students. A lot of my classmates including myself have improved since the mock exams. Even those who scored wish to improve on their mistakes. We have been working hard to show our true potential," she said.

At SCKL, the number of candidates for AS and A2 Levels this year is 350 and 700, respectively.

SCKL A Level programme senior lecturer Kingsley Row said the syllabus had been covered well before the MCO.

"A full-scale revision programme via past-year questions was in place. Students had made pre-mock examination attempts, which were being graded, returned and discussed. The discussions now continue online."

"For AS candidates, there is the added burden of covering A2 Level topics to prepare for the October and November examination." Teachers were awaiting the decisions, which would be reached by CAIE in collaboration with the exam centres, Row added.

"There may be some form of internal assessment, a measure which we understand is unprecedented in CAIE history. All teachers at Sunway are prepared to offer, at short notice, an immediate assessment of every candidate under our tutelage."

On students' university admission, he said: "This is a question for CAIE and the universities to answer."

If the alternative assessment methods, such as teacher-based evaluations, are acceptable to universities, then the stated impact might prove minimal."

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