

Adaptations in 2022 summer exams to ensure fairness for students

GCSE, AS and A level exams in England next summer will be adapted to maximise fairness and help students reach their potential.

Following a public consultation, the government and Ofqual have today (30 September) confirmed changes such as a choice of topics in some GCSE exams like English literature and history; advance information on the focus of exams to focus students' revision in subjects, where there is not a choice of topics; and support materials like formulae sheets in maths.

These plans recognise the disruption caused to this year group's education as a result of the pandemic, while balancing the need to return to exams as the fairest possible form of assessment. With exams set to return, Ofqual has also set out its approach to grading, following the last two years which saw an overall higher proportion of students receiving top grades compared to pre-pandemic years.

Next year will be a transition year to reflect the recovery period, with grade boundaries to be set by exam boards reflecting a midway point between 2021 and 2019 – so that more students get higher grades in 2022 than before the pandemic. This approach will provide a safety net for this year's students as well as a step back to normality, with results expected to return to the usual grade profile by 2023.

Education Secretary Nadhim Zahawi said:

We've put fairness at the heart of our approach and listened to pupils, teachers and parents. The measures we're putting in place will help reduce the impact of the significant disruption this group of young people have had to face – allowing them to move onto the next stage of their lives.

We are committed to rigorous standards being fairly applied, and exams are the fairest way to assess students, which is why they will take place next year.

The return to exams means teachers will be able to focus on teaching and helping students catch up on their learning, while adaptations ensure fairness for students and help them to focus their revision.

The consultation gathered more than 6,000 responses – with almost a quarter from students – and showed that more than 90 per cent of students and parents were in favour of giving advance information and around 80 per cent or more agreed with offering choices of topics.

It is the government's firm intention that exams will take place next year,

as the fairest way for students to show what they know and can do. But the government and Ofqual have also published proposals for Teacher Assessed Grades as a contingency measure if exams cannot go ahead, in the event that the course or impact of the pandemic changes.

Alongside this, the department has set out how these arrangements will apply to vocational and technical qualifications (VTQs).

Ofqual Chief Regulator, Dr Jo Saxton, said:

The interests of learners are central to Ofqual's mandate. For us, that means fairness. It means qualifications that stand the test of time, that employers, colleges and universities can trust.

Our grading approach will recognise the disruption experienced by students taking exams in 2022. It will provide a safety net for those who might otherwise just miss out on a higher grade, while taking a step back to normal.

Exams and other formal assessments are the best and fairest means of assessing students' achievements. Choice in some subjects and advance information to support revision are intended to provide support for all as we emerge from the pandemic. Advance information to help students focus their revision over the final months will be given for summer exams in early February and the timing will be kept under review subject to the course of the pandemic.

Results for exams next year will return to their normal format, with AS and A levels being released on 18 August, and GCSEs on 25 August. VTQs used to progress in a similar way will be issued on or before the same days, and other VTQs results will continue to be issued throughout the year.

The Government has committed to an ambitious and long-term education recovery plan, including an investment to date of over £3bn, helping young people prepare for exams as well as supporting school-aged children across the country. This includes a significant expansion of the tutoring programme, to support children and young people to make up for learning lost during the pandemic.